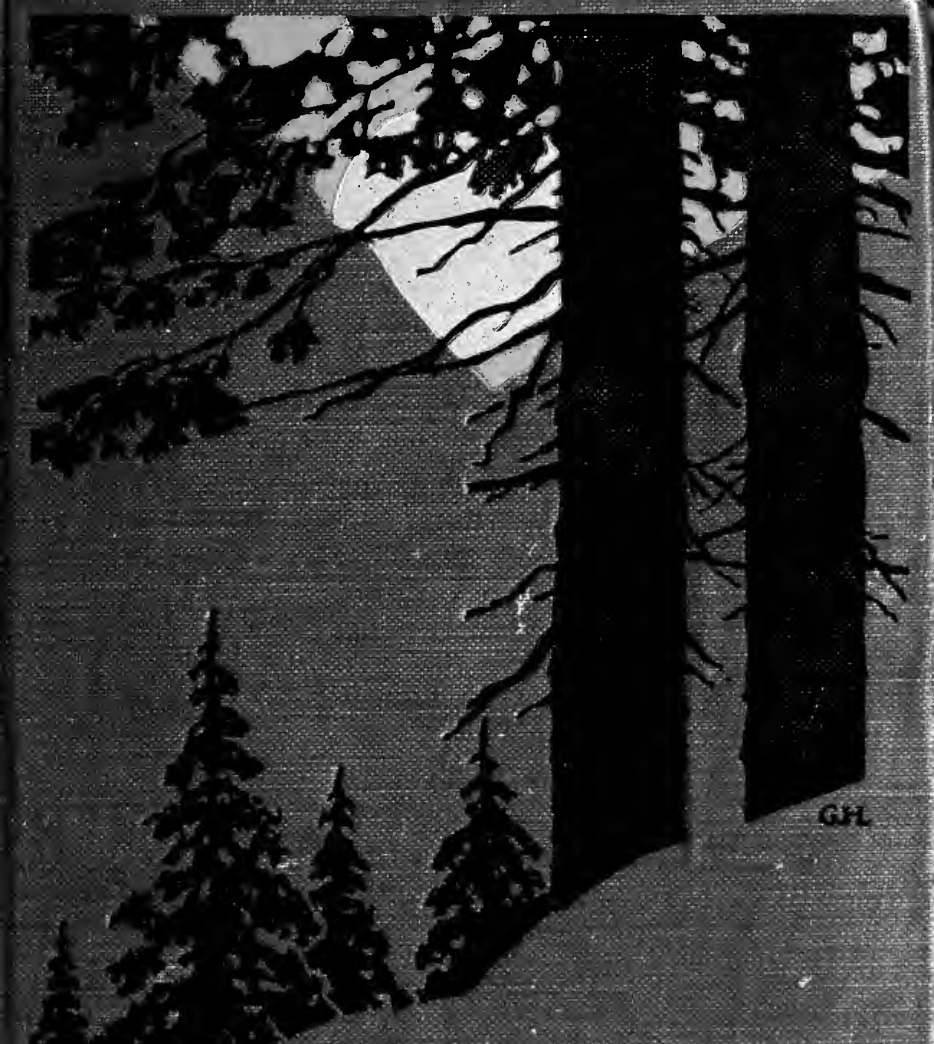

THURSTON OF ORCHARD VALLEY

HAROLD BINDLOSS

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THURSTON OF ORCHARD VALLEY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE CATTLE BARON'S DAUGHTER
ALTON OF SOMASCO
DUST OF CONFLICT
WINSTON OF THE PRAIRIE
FOR JACINTA
DELILAH OF THE SNOWS
BY RIGHT OF PURCHASE
LORIMER OF THE NORTHWEST
GREATER POWER

Thurston of Orchard Valley

By HAROLD BINDLOSS

Author of "By Right of Purchase," "Lorimer of the Northwest," "Alton of Somasco," etc.

With Frontispiece
By W. HERBERT DUNTON

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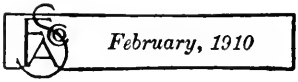

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THURSTON OF ORCHARD VALLEY

Thurston of Orchard Valley

CHAPTER I

"THURSTON'S FOLLY"

It was a pity that Geoffrey Thurston was following in his grandfather's footsteps, the sturdy dalefolk said, and several of them shook their heads solemnly as they repeated the observation when one morning the young man came striding down the steep street of a village in the North Country. The cluster of gray stone houses nestled beneath the scarred face of a crag, and, because mining operations had lately been suspended and work was scarce just then, pale-faced men in moleskin lounged about the slate-slab doorsteps. Above the village, and beyond the summit of the crag, the mouth of a tunnel formed a black blot on the sunlit slopes of sheep-cropped grass stretching up to the heather, which gave place in turn to rock out-crop on the shoulders of the fell. The loungers glanced at the tunnel regretfully, for that mine had furnished most of them with their daily bread.

"It's in t' blood," said one, nodding toward the young man. "Ay, headstrong folly's bred in t' bone of them, an' it's safer to counter an angry bull than a Thurston of Crosbie Ghyll. It's like his grandfather—roughed out of the old hard whinstane he is."

A murmur of approval followed, for the listeners knew there was a measure of truth in this; but it ceased when the pedestrian passed close to them with long, vigorous strides. Though several raised their hands half-way to their caps in grudging salute, Geoffrey Thurston, who appeared preoccupied, looked at none of them. Notwithstanding his youth, there were lines on his forehead and his brows were wrinkled over his eyes, while his carriage

suggested strength of limb and energy. Tall in stature his frame looked wiry rather than heavily built. His face was resolute, for both square jaw and steady brown eyes suggested tenacity of purpose. The hands that swung at his sides had been roughened by labor with pick and drill. Yet in spite of the old clay-stained shooting suit and shapeless slouch hat with the grease on the front of it, where a candle had been set, there was a stamp of command, and even refinement, about him. He was a Thurston of Crosbie, one of a family the members of which had long worked their own diminishing lands among the rugged fells that stretch between the West Riding and the Solway.

The Thurstons had been a reckless, hard-living race, with a stubborn, combative disposition. Most of them had found scope for their energies in wresting a few more barren acres from the grasp of moss and moor; but several times an eccentric genius had scattered to the winds what the rest had won, and Geoffrey seemed bent on playing the traditional *rôle* of spendthrift. There were, however, excuses for him. He was an ambitious man, and had studied mechanical science under a famous engineer. Perhaps, because the surface of the earth yielded a sustenance so grudgingly, a love of burrowing was born in the family. Copper was dear and the speculative public well disposed towards British mines. When current prices permitted it, a little copper had been worked from time immemorial in the depths of Crosbie Fell, so Geoffrey, continuing where his grandfather had ceased, drove the ancient adit deeper into the hill, mortgaging field by field to pay for tools and men, until, when the little property had well-nigh gone, he came upon a fault or break in the strata, which made further progress almost impossible.

When Thurston reached the mouth of the adit, he turned and looked down upon the poor climbing meadows under the great shoulder of the Fell. Beyond these, a few weatherbeaten buildings, forming a rude quadrangle

pierced by one tall archway, stood beside a tarn that winked like polished steel. He sighed as his glance rested upon them. For many generations they had sheltered the Thurstons of Crosbie; but, unless he could stoop to soil his hands in a fashion revolting to his pride, a strange master would own them before many months had gone. An angry glitter came into his eyes, and his face grew set, as, placing a lighted candle in his hat, he moved forward into the black adit.

Twenty minutes had passed when Thurston stood on the brink of a chasm where some movement of the earth's crust had rent the rocks asunder. Beside him was a mining engineer, whose fame for skill was greater than his reputation for integrity. Both men had donned coarse overalls, and Melhuish, the mining expert, held his candle so that its light fell upon his companion as well as upon the dripping surface of the rock. Moisture fell from the wet stone into the gloomy rift, and a faint monotonous splashing rose up from far below. Melhuish, however, was watching Thurston too intently to notice anything else. He was a middle-aged man, with a pale, puffy face and avaricious eyes. He was well-known to speculative financiers, who made much more than the shareholders of certain new mining companies.

"It's interesting geologically—wholly abnormal considering the stratification, though very unfortunate for you," said Melhuish. "I give you my word of honor that when I advised you to push on the heading I never expected this. However, there it is, and unless you're willing to consider certain suggestions already made, I can't see much use in wasting any more money. As I said, my friends would, under the circumstances, treat you fairly."

Thurston's face was impassive, and Melhuish, who thought that his companion bore himself with a curious equanimity for a ruined man, did not see that Thurston's hard fingers were clenched savagely on the handle of a pick.

"I fancied you understood my opinions, and I haven't changed them," said Geoffrey. "I asked you to meet me here to-day to consider whether the ore already in sight would be worth reduction, and you say, 'No.' You can advise your friends, when you see them, that I'm not inclined to assist them in a deliberate fraud upon the public."

Melhuish laughed. "You are exaggerating, and people seem perfectly willing to pay for their experience, whether they acquire it over copper, lead or tin. Besides, there's an average commercial probability that somebody will find good ore after going down far enough, and your part would be easy. You take a moderate price as vendor, we advancing enough to settle the mortgage. Sign the papers my friends will send you, and keep your mouth shut."

"And their expert wouldn't see that fault?" asked Geoffrey. Melhuish smiled pityingly before he answered:

"The gentlemen I speak of keep an expert who certainly wouldn't see any more than was necessary. The indications that deceived me are good enough for anybody. Human judgment is always liable to error, and there are ways of framing a report without committing the person who makes it. May I repeat that it's a fair business risk, and whoever takes this mine should strike the lead if sufficient capital is poured in. It would be desirable for you to act judiciously. My financial friends, I understand, have been in communication with the people who hold your mortgages."

Geoffrey Thurston's temper, always fiery, had been sorely tried. Dropping his pick, he gripped the tempter by the shoulder with fingers that held him like a vice. He pressed Melhuish backward until they stood within a foot of the verge of the black rift. Melhuish's face was gray in the candle-light as he heard the dislodged pebbles splash sullenly into the water, fathoms beneath. He had heard stories of the vagaries of the Thurstons of Crosbie,

and it was most unpleasant to stand on the brink of eternity, in the grasp of one of them.

Suddenly Geoffrey dropped his hands. "You need better nerves in your business, Melhuish," he said quietly. "One would hardly have fancied you would be so startled at a harmless joke intended to test them for you. There have been several spendthrifts and highly successful drunkards in my family, but, with the exception of my namesake, who was hanged like a Jacobite gentleman for taking, sword in hand, their despatches from two of Cumberland's dragoons, we have hitherto drawn the line at stealing."

"I'm not interested in genealogy, and I don't appreciate jests of the sort you have just tried," Melhuish answered somewhat shakily. "I'll take your word that you meant no harm, and I request further and careful consideration before you return a definite answer to my friends' suggestions."

"You shall have it in a few days," Geoffrey promised; and Melhuish, who determined to receive the answer under the open sunlight, and, if possible, with assistance near at hand, turned toward the mouth of the adit. Because he thought it wiser, he walked behind Geoffrey.

The afternoon was not yet past when Thurston stood leaning on the back of a stone seat outside a quaint old hall, which had once been a feudal fortalice and was now attached to an unprofitable farm. Because the impoverished gentleman, who held a long lease on the ancient building, had let one wing to certain sportsmen, several of Geoffrey's neighbors had gathered on the indifferently-kept lawn to enjoy a tennis match. Miss Millicent Austin sat in an angle of the stone seat. Her little feet, encased in white shoes, reposed upon a cushion that one of the sportsmen had insisted on bringing to her. Her hands lay idly folded in her lap. The delicate hands were characteristic, for Millicent Austin was slight and dainty. With pale gold hair and pink and white com-

plexion, she was a perfect type of Saxon beauty, though some of her rivals said the color of her eyes was too light a blue. They also added that the blue eyes were very quick to notice where their owner's interests lay.

An indefinite engagement had long existed between the girl and the man beside her, and at one time they had cherished a degree of affection for each other; but when the merry, high-spirited girl returned from London changed into a calculating woman, Geoffrey was bound up, mind and body, in his mine, and Millicent began to wonder whether, with her advantages, she might not do better than to marry a dalesman burdened by heavy debts. They formed a curious contrast, the man brown-haired, brown-eyed, hard-handed, rugged of feature, and sometimes rugged of speech; and the dainty woman who appeared born for a life of ease and luxury.

"Beauty and the beast!" said one young woman to her companion as she laid by her racquet. "I suppose he has the money?"

"Unless his mine proves successful I don't think either will have much; but if Miss Austin is a beauty in a mild way, he's a noble beast, one very likely to turn the tables upon a rash hunter," was the answer. "And yet he's stalking blindly into the snare. Alas, poor lion!"

"You seem interested in him. I'm not partial to wild beasts myself," remarked her companion, and the other smiled as she answered:

"Hardly that, but I know the family history, and they are a curious race with great capabilities for good or evil. It all depends upon how they are led, because nobody could drive a Thurston. It is rather, I must confess, an instinctive prejudice against the woman beside him. I do not like, and would not trust, Miss Austin, though, of course, except to you, my dear, I would not say so."

The young speaker glanced a moment towards the pair, and then passed on with a slight frown upon her honest

face, for Thurston bent over his companion with something that suggested deadly earnestness in his attitude, and the spectator assumed that Millicent Austin's head was turned away from him, because she possessed a fine profile and not because of excessive diffidence. Nor was the observer wrong, for Millicent did little without a purpose, and was just then thinking keenly as she said:

"I am very sorry to hear about your misfortune, Geoffrey, but there is a way of escape from most disasters if one will look for it, you know, and if you came to terms with them I understand those London people would, at least, recoup you for your expenditure."

"You have heard of that!" exclaimed Geoffrey sharply, displeased that his *fiancée*, who had been away, should betray so accurate a knowledge of all that concerned his business affairs.

"Of course I did. I made Tom tell me. You will agree with them, will you not?" the girl replied.

"No," said Geoffrey, with a slight huskiness. "I wish I could, but it is impossible, and I am not pleased that Tom should tell you what I was waiting to confide to you myself. Let that pass, for I want you to listen to me. The old holding will have to go, and there is little room for a poor man in this overcrowded country. As you know, certain property will revert to me eventually, but, remembering what is in our blood, I dare not trust myself to drag out a life of idleness or monotonous drudgery, waiting for the future here. The curse is a very real thing—and it would not be fair to you. Now I can save enough from the wreck to start us without positive hardship over seas, and George has written offering me a small share in his Australian cattle-run. You shall want for nothing, Millicent, that toil can win you, and I know that, with you to help me, I shall achieve at least a competence."

Millicent, who glanced up at him as if she were carefully studying him, could see that the man spoke with

conviction. She knew that his power of effort and dogged obstinacy would carry him far toward obtaining whatever his heart desired. She dropped her long lashes as he continued:

"Hitherto, I have overcome the taint I spoke of—you knew what it was when you gave me your promise—and working hard, with you to cheer me, in a new land under the open sun, I shall crush it utterly. Semi-poverty, with an ill-paid task that demanded but half my energies, would try you, Millicent, and be dangerous to me. What I say sounds very selfish, doesn't it—but you will come?"

There was an appeal in his voice which touched the listener. It was seldom a Thurston of Crosbie asked help from anyone; but she had no wish to encourage Geoffrey in what she considered his folly, and shook her head with a pretty assumption of petulance.

"Don't be sensational," she said with a wave of her hand. "You are prone to exaggeration, and, of course, I will not go with you. How could I help you to chase wild cattle? Now, try to be sensible! Come to terms with these company people, and then you need not go."

"Would you have me a thief?" asked Geoffrey, gazing down upon her with a fierce resentment in his look of reproach, and the girl shrank from him a little.

"No, but, so far as I understand it, this is an ordinary business transaction, and if these people are willing to buy the mine, why should you refuse?" she returned in a temporizing tone.

If Thurston was less in love with Millicent Austin than he had been, he hardly realized it then. He was disappointed, and his forehead contracted as he struggled with as heavy a temptation as could have assailed the honor of any man. Millicent was very fair to look upon, as she turned to him with entreaty and anxiety in her face.

Nevertheless, he answered wearily: "It is not an ordinary business transaction. These people would pay

me with the general public's money, and when the mine proves profitless, as it certainly will, they would turn the deluded shareholders loose on me."

"There are always risks in mining," Millicent observed significantly. "The investing public understands that, doesn't it? Of course, I would not have you dishonest, but, Geoffrey——"

Thurston was patient in action, but seldom in speech, and he broke out hotly:

"Many a woman has sent a man to his damnation for a little luxury, but I expected help from you. Millicent, if I assist those swindlers and stay here dragging out the life of a gentleman pauper on a dole of stolen money, I shall go down and down, dragging you with me. If you will come out to a new country with me, I know you will never regret it. Whatever is best worth winning over there, I will win for you. Can't you see that we stand at the crossroads, and whichever way we choose there can be no turning back! Think, and for God's sake think well! The decision means everything to you and me."

Again Millicent was aware of an unwilling admiration for the speaker, even though she had little for his sentiments. He stood erect, with a grim look on his face, his nostrils quivering, and his lips firmly set—stubborn, vindictive, powerful. Though his strength was untrained, she knew that he was a man to trust—great in his very failings, with no meanness in his composition, and clearly born for risky enterprise and hazardous toil. She was a little afraid of him, a fact which was not in itself unpleasant; but she dreaded poverty and hardship! With a shrug of the shoulder upon which he had laid his hand, she said:

"I think you are absurd to-day; you are hurting me. This melodramatic pose approaches the ludicrous, and I have really no patience with your folly. A little period of calm reflection may prove beneficial, and I will leave you to it. Clara is beckoning me."

She turned away, and Thurston, after vainly looking around for Clara, stalked sullenly into the hall, where he flung himself down in a chair beside an open window. It did not please him to see Millicent take her place before the net in the tennis court and to hear her laugh ring lightly across the lawn. A certain sportsman named Leslie, who had devoted himself to Miss Austin's service, watched him narrowly from a corner of the big hall.

"You look badly hipped over something, Thurston," commented the sportsman presently. "I suppose it's the mine, and would like to offer my sympathy. Might I recommend a brandy-and-soda, one of those Cubanos, and confidence? Tom left the bottle handy for you."

In spite of the family failing, or, perhaps, because it was the only thing he feared, Thurston had been an abstemious man. Now, however, he emptied one stiff tumbler at a gulp, and the soda frothed in the second, when he noticed a curious smile, for just a moment, in the eyes of his companion. The smile vanished immediately, but Thurston had seen and remembered. It was characteristic of him that, before two more seconds had passed, the glass crashed into splinters in the grate.

"Quite right!" exclaimed Leslie, nodding. "When one feels as you evidently do, a little of that sort of consolation is considerably better than too much. You don't, however, appear to be in a companionable humor, and perhaps I had better not intrude on you."

During the rest of the afternoon, Thurston saw little of Millicent and Leslie was much with her.

The weather changed suddenly when at dusk Geoffrey rode home. In forecast of winter, a bitter breeze sighed across the heather and set the harsh grasses moaning eerily. The sky was somber overhead; scarred fell and towering pike had faded to blurs of dingy gray, and the ghostly whistling of curlew emphasized the emptiness of the darkening moor. The evening's mood suited Geoffrey's, and he rode slowly with loose bridle. The bouquet of the

brandy had awakened within him a longing that he dreaded, and though, hitherto, he had been too intent upon his task to trouble about his character, it was borne in upon him that he must stand fast now or never. But it was not the thought of his own future which first appealed to him. Those who had gone before him had rarely counted consequences when tempted by either wine or women, and he would have risked that freely. Geoffrey was, however, in his own eccentric fashion, a just man, and he dared not risk bringing disaster upon Millicent. So he rode slowly, thinking hard, until the horse, which seemed affected by its master's restlessness, plunged as a dark figure rose out of the heather.

"Hallo, is it you, Evans?" asked the rider, with a forced laugh. "I thought it was the devil. He's abroad to-night."

"Thou'rt wrang, Mr. Geoffrey," answered the gamekeeper. "It's Thursday night he comes. Black Jim as broke thy head for thee is coming with t' quarrymen to poach t' covers. Got the office from yan with a grudge against t' gang, an' Captain Franklin, who's layin' for him, sends his compliments, thinkin' as maybe thee would like t' fun."

Thurston rarely forgot either an injury or a friend, and, the preceding October, when tripping, he fell helpless, Black Jim twice, with murderous intent, had brought a gun-butt down upon his unprotected skull. Excitement was at all times as wine to him, so, promising to be at the rendezvous, he rode homeward faster than before, with a sense of anticipation which helped to dull the edge of his care.

CHAPTER II

A DISILLUSION

It was a clear cold night when Geoffrey Thurston met Captain Franklin, who held certain sporting rights in the vicinity, at the place agreed upon. The captain had brought with him several amateur assistants and stable-hands besides two stalwart keepers. Greeting Thurston he said:

"Very good of you to help me! Our local constable is either afraid or powerless, and I must accordingly allow Black Jim's rascals to sweep my covers or take the law into my own hands. It is the pheasants he is after now, and he'll start early so as to get his plunder off from the junction by the night mail, and because the moon rises soon. We had better divide, and you might come with Evans and me to the beeches while the others search the fir spinney."

Geoffrey, assenting, followed the officer across a dew-damped meadow and up a winding lane hung with gossamer-decked briars, until the party halted, ankle-deep among withered leaves, in a dry ditch just outside the wood. There were reasons why each detail of all that happened on that eventful night should impress itself upon Geoffrey's memory, and, long afterwards, when wandering far out in the shadow of limitless forests or the chill of eternal snow, he could recall every incident. Leaves that made crimson glories by day still clung low down about the wide-girthed trunks beyond the straggling hedge of ancient thorns, but the higher branches rose nakedly against faintly luminous sky. Spruce firs formed clumps of solid blackness, and here and there a delicate tracery of birch boughs filled gaps against the sky-line between. The meadows behind him were silent and

empty, streaked with belts of spectral mist, and, because it was not very late, he could see a red glimmer of light in the windows of Barrow Hall.

But if the grass told no story it was otherwise with the wood, for Geoffrey could hear the rabbits thumping in their burrows among the roots of the thorn. Twice a cock-pheasant uttered a drowsy, raucous crow, and there was a blundering of unseen feathery bodies among the spruce, while, when this ceased, he heard a water-hen flutter with feet splashing across a hidden pool. Then heavy stillness followed, intensified by the clamor of a beck which came foaming down the side of a fell until, clattering loudly, wood-pigeons, neither asleep nor wholly awake, drove out against the sky, wheeled and fell clumsily into the wood again. All this was a plain warning, and keeper Evans nodded agreement when Captain Franklin said:

"There's somebody here, and, in order not to miss him, we'll divide our forces once more. If you'll go in by the Hall footpath, Thurston, and whistle on sight of anything suspicious, I'd be much obliged to you."

A few minutes later Thurston halted on the topmost step of the lofty stile by which a footpath from the Hall entered the wood. Looking back across misty grass land and swelling ridges of heather, he could see a faint brightness behind the eastern rim of the moor; but, when he stepped down, it was very dark among the serried tree-trunks. The slender birches had faded utterly, the stately beeches resembled dim ghosts of trees and only the spruces retained, imperfectly, their shape and form. Thurston was country bred, and, lifting high his feet to clear bramble trailer and fallen twig, he walked by feeling instead of sight. The beck moaned a little more loudly, and there was a heavy astringent odor of damp earth and decaying leaves. When beast and bird were still again it seemed as if Nature, worn out by the productive effort of summer, were sinking under solemn silence into her winter sleep.

The watcher knew the wood was a large one and unlawful visitants might well be hidden towards its farther end. He stood still at intervals, concentrating all his powers to listen, but his ears told him nothing until at last there was a rustle somewhere ahead. Puzzled by the sound, which reminded him of something curiously out of place in the lonely wood, he instantly sank down behind an ash tree.

The sound certainly was not made by withered bracken or bramble leaves, and had nothing to do with the stealthy fall of a poacher's heavy boot. It came again more clearly, and Thurston was almost sure that it was the rustle of a woven fabric, such as a woman's dress. To confirm this opinion a soft laugh followed. He rose, deciding it could only be some assignation with a maid from the Hall, and no business of his. He had turned to retreat when he noticed the eastern side of a silver fir reflect a faint shimmer. Glancing along the beam of light that filtered through a fantastic fretwork of delicate birch twigs arching a drive, he saw a broad, bright disk hanging low above the edge of the moor. It struck him that perhaps the poachers had used the girl to coax information out of a young groom or keeper, and that she was now warning them. So he waited, debating, because he was a rudely chivalrous person, how he might secure the girl's companion without involving the girl's disgrace. Again a laugh rose from beyond a thicket. Then he heard the voice of a man.

Geoffrey was puzzled, for the laugh was musical, unlike a rustic giggle; and, though the calling of the beck partly drowned it, the man's voice did not resemble that of a laborer. Thurston moved again, wondering whether it was not some affair of Leslie's from the Hall, and whether he ought not to slip away after all. The birch boughs sighed a little, there was a fluttering down of withered leaves, and he remained undecided, gripping his stout oak cudgel by the middle. Then the hot blood pulsed fiercely

through every artery, for the voice rose once more, harsh and clear this time, with almost a threat in the tone, and there was no possibility of doubting that the speaker was Leslie.

"This cannot continue, Millicent," the voice said. "It has gone on too long, and I will not be trifled with. You cannot have both of us, and my patience is exhausted. Leave the fool to his folly."

Geoffrey raised the cudgel and dropped it to his side. Turning suddenly cold, he remained for a second or two almost without power of thought or motion. The disillusion was cruel. The woman's light answer filled him with returning fury and he hurled himself at a thicket from which, amid a crash of branches, he reeled out into the sight of the speakers. The moon was well clear of the moor now, and silver light and inky shadow checkered the mosses of the drive.

With a little scream of terror Millicent sprang apart from her companion's side and stood for a space staring at the man who had appeared out of the rent-down undergrowth. The pale light beat upon Geoffrey's face, showing it was white with anger. Looking from Geoffrey, the girl glanced towards Leslie, who waited in the partial shadow of a hazel bush. Even had he desired to escape, which was possible, the bush would have cut off his retreat.

Geoffrey turned fiercely from one to the other. The woman, who stood with one hand on a birch branch, was evidently struggling to regain her courage. Her lips were twitching and her pale blue eyes were very wide open. The man was shrinking back as far as possible in a manner which suggested physical fear; he had heard the dalesfolk say a savage devil, easily aroused, lurked in all the Thurstons, and the one before him looked distinctly dangerous just then. Leslie was weak in limb as well as moral fiber, and it was Geoffrey who broke the painful silence.

"What are you doing here at such an hour with this man, Millicent?" he asked sternly. "No answer! It appears that some explanation is certainly due to me—and I mean to force it out of one of you."

Millicent, saying nothing, gazed at her companion, as if conjuring him to speak plainly and to end an intolerable position. Geoffrey read her meaning, even though Leslie, who glanced longingly over his shoulder down the drive, refused to do so. Because there was spirit in her, and she had recovered from the first shock of surprise, Millicent ground one little heel into the mosses with a gesture of disgust and anger when the man made answer:

"I resent your attitude and question. We came out to see the moon rise on the moor, and found the night breeze nipping."

Geoffrey laughed harshly before he repeated: "You found the breeze nipping! There is scarcely an air astir. And you understand the relations existing between Miss Austin and me? I want a better reason. Millicent, you, at least, are not a coward—dare you give it me?"

"I challenge your right to demand an account of my actions," said the girl. With an evident effort to defy Thurston, she added, after a pause, "But the explanation must have come sooner or later, and you shall have it now. I have grown—perhaps the brutal truth is best—tired of you and your folly. You would sacrifice my future to your fantastic pride—and this man would give up everything for me."

The first heat of Geoffrey's passion was past, and he was now coldly savage because of the woman's treachery.

"Including his conscience and honor, but not his personal safety!" he supplemented contemptuously. "Millicent, one could almost admire you." Turning to Leslie he asked: "But are you struck dumb that you let the woman speak? This was my promised wife to whom you have been making love, though, for delicacy would be superfluous, it is evident that she has not discouraged

you. Until three days ago I could have trusted my life to her. Now, I presume, she has pledged herself to you?"

"Yes," answered Leslie, recovering his equanimity as his fears grew less oppressive. He began to excuse himself but Geoffrey cut him short with a gesture.

"Then, even if I desired to make them, my protests would be useless," said Geoffrey. "I am at least grateful for your frankness, Millicent; it prevented me from wringing the truth from your somewhat abject lover. Had you told me honestly, when this man first spoke to you, that you had grown tired of me, I would have released you, and I would have tried to wish you well. Now I can only say, that at least you know the worst of each other —and there will be less disappointment when, stripped of either mutual or self respect, you begin life together. But I was forgetting that Franklin's keepers are searching the wood. Some of them might talk. Go at once by the Hall path, as softly as you can."

The man and the girl were plainly glad to hurry away, and Geoffrey waited until the sound of their footsteps became scarcely audible before he heeded a faint rustling which indicated that somebody with a knowledge of woodcraft was forcing a passage through the undergrowth. He broke a dry twig at intervals as he walked slowly for a little distance. Then he dropped on hands and knees to cross a strip of open sward at an angle to his previous course, and lay still in the black shadow of a spruce. It was evident that somebody was following his trail, and the pursuer, passing his hiding-place, followed it straight on. Geoffrey's was a curious character, and the very original cure for a disappointment in love, that of baffling a game watcher while his faithless mistress escaped, brought him relief; it left no time for reflection.

Presently he dashed across a bare strip of velvet mosses and rabbit-cropped turf, slipped between the roots of the hedge, and, running silently beneath it, halted several score yards away face to face with the astonished keeper.

"Weel, I'm danged; this clean beats me," gasped that worthy. "Hello, behind there. It's only Mr. Geoffrey, sir. Didst see Black Jim slip out this way, or hear a scream a laal while gone by?"

"I saw no one," answered Geoffrey, "but I heard the scream. It was not unlike a hare squealing in a snare. You and I must have been stalking each other, Evans, and Black Jim can't be here."

The rest came up as they spoke, and Captain Franklin said, "You seem badly disappointed at missing your old enemy, Thurston. I never saw you look so savage. I expect Black Jim has tricked us, after all."

"I've had several troubles lately, and don't find much amusement in hunting poachers who aren't there," said Geoffrey. "You will excuse me from going back with you."

He departed across the meadows, at a swinging pace, and the keeper, who stared after him, commented:

"Something gradely wrang with Mr. Geoffrey to-night. They're an ill folk to counter yon, and it's maybe as well for Black Jim as Mr. Geoffrey didn't get hold on him."

Geoffrey saw no more of Millicent, but once he visited her younger sister, a gentle invalid, who, because of the friendship which had long existed between them, said: "You must try to believe I mean it in kindness when I say that I am not wholly sorry, Geoffrey. You and Millicent would never have gotten on well together, and while I wish the awakening could have happened in a more creditable way, you will realize—when somebody else makes you happy—that all has been for the best."

"That day will be long in coming," declared the man, grimly, and the sick girl laid a thin white hand on his hard one as she answered him.

"It is not a flattering speech, and you must not lose faith in all of us," the invalid went on. "Lying still here, helpless, I have often thought about both of you,

and I feel that you have done well in choosing a new life in a new country. When you go out, Geoffrey, you will take my fervent wishes for your welfare with you."

Janet Austin was frail and worn by pain. Her pale face flushed a little as the man suddenly stooped and touched her forehead with his lips.

"God bless you for your kindly heart," he said. "A ruined man has very few friends, and many acquaintances are waiting to convince him that his downfall is the result of his own folly, but"—and he straightened his wiry frame, while his eyes glinted—"they have not seen the end, and even if beaten, there is satisfaction in a stubborn, single-handed struggle."

Janet Austin, perhaps thinking of her own helplessness, sighed as she answered:

"I do not think you will be beaten, Geoffrey, but if you will take advice from me, remember that over-confidence in your powers and the pride that goes with it may cost you many a minor victory. Good-by, and good luck, Geoffrey. You will remember me."

That afternoon, while Thurston was in the midst of preparations to leave his native land, the mining engineer called upon him with a provincial newspaper in his hand. "I suppose this is your answer," he remarked, laying his finger on a paragraph.

"Mr. G. Thurston, who has, in the face of many difficulties, attempted to exploit the copper vein in Crosbie Fell, has been compelled to close the mine," the printed lines ran. "We understand he came upon an unexpected break in the strata, coupled with a subsidence which practically precludes the possibility of following the lost lead with any hope of commercial success. He has, therefore, placed his affairs in the hands of Messrs. Lonsdale & Routh, solicitors, and, we understand, intends emigrating. His many friends and former employees wish him success."

"Yes," Geoffrey answered dryly, "I sent them the information, also a copy to London financial papers. Considering the interest displayed just now in British mines, they should insert a paragraph. I've staked down your backers' game in return for your threats, and you may be thankful you have come off so easily. Your check is ready. It is the last you will ever get from me."

The expert smiled almost good-naturedly. "You needn't have taken so much trouble, Thurston," he said. "The exploitation of your rabbit burrow would only have been another drop in the bucket to my correspondents, and it's almost a pity we can't be friends, for, with some training, your sledge-hammer style would make its mark in the ring."

"Thanks!" replied Geoffrey. "I'm not fishing for compliments, and it's probably no use explaining my motives—you wouldn't understand them. Still, in future, don't set down every man commonly honest as an uncommon fool. If I ever had much money, which is hardly likely, I should fight extremely shy of any investments recommended by your friends!"

CHAPTER III

GEOFFREY'S FIRST CONTRACT

It was springtime among the mountains which, glistening coldly white with mantles of eternal snow, towered above the deep-sunk valley, when, one morning, Geoffrey Thurston limped painfully out of a redwood forest of British Columbia. The boom of a hidden river set the pine sprays quivering. A blue grouse was drumming deliriously on the top of a stately fir, and the morning sun drew clean, healing odors from balsam and cedar.

The scene was characteristic of what is now the grandest and wildest, as it will some day be the richest, province of the Canadian Dominion. The serene majesty of snow-clad heights and the grandeur of vast shadowy aisles, with groined roofs of red branches and mighty colonnades of living trunks, were partly lost upon the traveler who, most of the preceding night, had trudged wearily over rough railroad ballast. He had acquired Colonial experience of the hardest kind by working through the winter in an Ontario logging camp, which is a rough school.

An hour earlier the man, to visit whom Thurston had undertaken an eight-league journey, had laughed in his face when he offered to drain a lake which flooded his ranch. Saying nothing, but looking grimmer than ever, Geoffrey had continued his weary journey in search of sustenance. He frowned as he flung himself down beneath a fir, for, shimmering like polished steel between the giant trees, the glint of water caught his eye, and the blue wood smoke curling over the house on a distant slope suggested the usual plentiful Colonial breakfast.

Although Geoffrey's male forbears had been reckless

men, his mother had transmitted him a strain of north-country canniness. The remnant of his poor possessions, converted into currency, lay in a Canadian bank to provide working capital and, finding no scope for his mental abilities, he had wandered here and there endeavoring to sell the strength of his body for daily bread. Sometimes he had been successful, more often he had failed, but always, when he would accept it, the kindly bush settlers gave him freely of their best. As he basked in the warmth and brightness, he took from his pocket a few cents' worth of crackers. When he had eaten, his face relaxed, for the love of wild nature was born in him, and the glorious freshness of the spring was free to the poorest as well as to the richest. He stooped to drink at a glacier-fed rill, and then producing a corn-cob pipe, sighed on finding that only the tin label remained of his cake of tobacco.

Through the shadow of the firs two young women watched him with curiosity. The man looked worn and weary, his jean jacket was old and torn, and an essential portion of one boot was missing. The stranger's face had been almost blackened by the snow-reflected glare of the clear winter sun, and yet both girls decided that he was hardly a representative specimen of the wandering fraternity of tramps.

Helen Savine was slender, tall, and dark. Though arrayed in a plain dress of light fabric, she carried herself with a dignity befitting the daughter of the famous engineering contractor, Julius Savine, and a descendant, through her mother, from Seigneurs of ancient French descent who had ruled in patriarchal fashion in old-world Quebec. Jean Graham, whose father owned the ranch on the slope behind them, was ruddy in face, with a solidity of frame that betokened Caledonian extraction, and true trans-Atlantic directness of speech.

"He must be hungry," whispered Jean. "Quite good-looking, too, and it's queer he sits there munching those

crackers, instead of walking straight up and striking us for a meal. I don't like to see a good-looking man hungry," she added, reflectively.

"We will go down and speak to him," said Helen, and the suggestion that she should interview a wandering vagrant did not seem out of place in that country where men from many different walks of life turned their often ill-fitted hands to the rudest labor that promised them a livelihood. In any case, Helen possessed a somewhat imperious will, which was supplemented by a grace of manner which made whatever she did appear right.

Geoffrey, looking round at the sound of approaching steps, stood suddenly upright, thrusting the more dilapidated boot behind the other, and wondering with what purpose the two girls had sought him. One he recognized as a type common enough throughout the Dominion—kindly, shrewd, somewhat hard-featured and caustic in speech; but the other, who looked down on him with thinly-veiled pity, more resembled the women of birth and education whom he had seen in England.

"You are a stranger to this district. Looking for work, perhaps?" said Helen Savine. Geoffrey lifted his wide and battered felt hat as he answered, "I am."

"There is work here," announced Helen. "I can offer you a dollar now—if you would care to earn it. Yonder rock, which I believe is a loose boulder, obstructs our wagon trail. If you are willing to remove it and will follow us to the ranch, you will find suitable tools."

Geoffrey flushed a little under his tan. When seeking work he had grown used to being sworn at by foremen with Protectionist tendencies, but it galled him to be offered a woman's charity, and the words "If you would care to earn it," left a sting. Nevertheless, he reflected that any superfluous sensitiveness would be distinctly out of place in one of his position, and, considering the wages paid in that country, the man who rolled the boulder clear would well earn his dollar. Accordingly he an-

swered: "I should be glad to remove the rock, if I can."

The two young women turned back towards the ranch, and Thurston followed respectfully, as far as possible in the rear, that they might not observe the condition of his attire. This was an entirely superfluous precaution, for Helen's keen eyes had noticed.

Reaching the ranch, Geoffrey possessed himself of a grub-hoe, which is a pick with an adz-shaped blade with an ax and shovel; also he returned with the girls to the boulder. For an hour or two he toiled hard, grubbing out hundredweights of soil and gravel from round about the rock. Then cutting a young fir he inserted the butt of it as a lever, and spent another thirty minutes focusing his full strength on the opposite end. The rock, however, refused to move an inch, and, because a few crackers are not much for a hungry man to work on after an all-night march, Thurston became conscious that he had a headache and a distressful stitch in his side. Still, being obstinate and filled with an unreasoning desire to prove his trustworthiness to his fair employer, he continued doggedly, and after another hour's digging found the stone still immovable. Then it happened that while, with the perspiration dripping from him, he tugged at the lever, the rancher who had rebuffed him that morning, drew rein close beside.

"Hello! What are you after now? You're messing all this trail up if you're doing nothing else," he declared in a tone of challenge.

"If you have come here to amuse yourself at my expense, take care. I'm not in the mood for baiting," answered Thurston, who still smarted under the recollection of the summary manner in which the speaker had rejected his proffered services. "There are, however, folks in this country more willing to give a stranger a chance than you, and I've taken a contract to remove that rock for a dollar. Now, if you are satisfied, ride on your way."

"Then you've made a blame bad bargain," commented the rancher, with unruffled good humor. "I was figuring that I might help you. I thought you were a hobo after my chickens, or trying to bluff me into a free meal this morning. If you'd asked straight for it, I'd have given it you."

Geoffrey hesitated, divided between an inclination to laugh or to assault the rancher, who perhaps guessed his thoughts, for, dismounting, he said:

"If you're so mighty thin-skinned what are you doing here? Why don't you British dukes stop right back in your own country where folks touch their hats to you? Let me on to that lever."

For at least twenty minutes, the two men tugged and panted. Then Bransome, the rancher, said:

"The blame thing's either part of the out-crop or wedged fast there forever, and I've no more time to spare. Say, Graham's a hard man, and has been playing it low on you. What's the matter with turning his contract up and going over to fill oat bags for me?"

"Thanks, but having given my word to move that rock, I'm going to stay here until I do it," answered Geoffrey; and Bransome, nodding to him, rode on towards the ranch.

When he reached it Bransome said to Jean Graham in the hearing of Miss Savine:

"The old man has taken in yonder guileless stranger who has put two good dollars' worth of work into that job already, and the rock's rather faster than it was before."

"Did he say Mr. Graham hired him?" asked Helen, and she drew her own inference when Bransome answered:

"Why, no! I put it that way, and he didn't contradict me."

It was afternoon when Thurston realized at last that even considerable faith in one's self is not sufficient, unaided, to move huge boulders. He felt faint and hungry, but the pride of the Insular Briton restrained him from

begging for a meal. His own dislike to acknowledge defeat also prompted him to decide that where weary muscles failed, mechanical power might succeed, and he determined to tramp back a league to the settlement in the hope of perhaps obtaining a drill and some giant powder on credit. He had not studied mining theoretically as well as in a costly practical school for nothing.

It was a rough trail to the settlement. The red dust lay thick upon it and the afternoon sun was hot. When at last, powdered all over with dust and very weary, Thurston came in sight of the little wooden store, he noticed Bransome's horse fastened outside it. He did not see the rancher, who sat on an empty box behind a sugar hogshead inside the counter.

"I want two sticks of giant powder, a fathom or two of fuse, and several detonators," said Geoffrey as indifferently as he could. "I have only two bits at present to pay for them, but if they don't come to more than a dollar you shall have the rest to-morrow. I also want to borrow a drill."

The storekeeper was used to giving much longer credit than Geoffrey wanted, but the glance he cast at the applicant was not reassuring, and it is possible he might have refused his request, but that, unseen by Thurston, Bransome signaled to him from behind the barrel.

"We don't trade that way with strangers generally," the storekeeper answered. "Still, if you want them special, and will pay me what they're worth to-morrow, I'll oblige you, and even lend you a set of drills. But you'll come back sure, and not lose any of them drills?" he added dubiously.

"I haven't come here to rob you. It's a business deal, and not a favor I'm asking," asserted Geoffrey grimly, and when he withdrew the storekeeper observed:

"Why can't you do your own charity, Bransome, instead of taxing me? That's the crank who wanted to

run your lake down, isn't he? I guess I'll never see either him or them drills again."

"You will," the rancher assured him. "If that man's alive to-morrow you'll get your money; I'll go bail for him. He's just the man you mention, but I'm considerably less sure about the crankiness than I was this morning. There's a quantity of fine clean sand in him."

Meanwhile, and soon after Geoffrey had set out for the store, the two girls strolled down the trail to ascertain how he was progressing. They looked at each other significantly when they came upon the litter of débris and tools.

"Lit out!" announced Jean Graham. "The sight of all that work was too much for him. He'll be lying on his back now by the river thinking poetry. This country's just thick with reposeful Britishers nobody at home has any use for, and their kind friends ship off onto us. In a way I'm sorry. He lit out hungry, and he didn't look like a loafer."

"I'm afraid we were a little hard upon him," said Helen, smiling. "Still, I am somewhat surprised he did not carry out his bargain."

"You can never trust those gilt-edge Britishers," said Jean Graham with authority. "There was old man Peters who took one of them in, and he'd sit in the store nights making little songs to his banjo, and talking just wonderful. Said he was a baronet or something, if he had his rights, and made love to Sally. Old fool Peters believed him, and lent him three hundred dollars to start a lawsuit over his English property with. Dessay Peters thought red-haired Sally would look well trailing round as a countess in a gold-hemmed dress. The baronet took the money, but wanted some more, and lit out the same night with Lou of the Sapin Rouge saloon."

"I should hardly expect all that from our acquaintance of this morning, but I am disappointed, though I'm sure I don't know why I should be," said Helen Savine.

The sunlight had faded from the valley, though the peaks still shimmered orange and red, and the broken edge of a glacier flashed like a great rose diamond, when the two girls sat on the veranda encircling Graham's ranch-house. The rancher and his stalwart sons were away rounding up his cattle, but Jean was expecting both them and her mother and the delayed supper was ready. The evening was very still and cool. The life-giving air was heavy with the breath of dew-touched cedars, while the hoarse clamor of the river accentuated the hush of the mountain solitude. Strange to say, both of the girls were thinking about the vagrant, and Helen Savine, who considered herself a judge of character, had been more impressed by him than she would have cared to admit. There was no doubt, she reflected, that the man was tolerably good-looking and had enjoyed some training, though perhaps not the best, in England. He had also known adversity, she deduced from the gauntness of his face and a certain grimness of expression. She had noticed that his chin indicated a masterful expression and she was, therefore, the more surprised that he had allowed himself to be vanquished by the boulder.

Suddenly a heavy crash broke through the musical jangle of cow bells that drew nearer up the valley, and a cloud of yellow smoke curling above the dark branches spread itself across the fir tops in filmy folds.

"I guess that's our hobo blowing the rock up!" cried Jean. "I wonder where he stole the giant powder from. Well, daddy's found his cattle, and the swearing will have made him hungry. I'll start Kate on to the supper, and we'll bring the man in when he comes round for his dollar."

Presently Thurston knocked at the door, and strode in at a summons to enter. Slightly abashed, he halted inside the threshold. Jean, looking ruddy and winsome in light print dress, with sleeves rolled clear of each plump fore-arm, was spreading great platefuls of hot cakes and

desiccated fruits among the more solid viands on the snowy tablecloth. Geoffrey found it difficult to refrain from glancing wolfishly at the good things until his eyes rested upon Miss Savine, and then it cost him an effort to turn them away. Helen reclined on an ox-hide lounge. An early rose rested among the glossy clusters of her thick, dark hair. A faint tinge of crimson showed through the pale olive in her cheek, and he caught the glimmer of pearly teeth between the ripe red lips. In her presence he grew painfully conscious that he was ragged, toil-stained and dusty, though he had made the best toilet he could beside a stream.

"I have removed the rock, and have brought the tools back," he said.

"How much did the explosives cost you?" asked Helen, and Geoffrey smiled.

"If you will excuse me, is not that beside the question? I engaged to remove the boulder, and I have done it," he answered.

Ever since her mother's death, Helen Savine had ruled her father and most of the men with whom she came in contact. She had come to the ranch with Mr. Savine, who was interested in many enterprises in the neighborhood and she was prepared to be interested in whatever occurred. Few of her wishes ever had been thwarted, so, naturally, she was conscious of a faint displeasure that a disheveled wanderer should even respectfully slight her question. Placing two silver coins on the table, she said coldly:

"Then here are your convenanted wages, and we are obliged to you."

Geoffrey handed one of the coins back with a slight inclination of his head. "Our bargain was one dollar, madam, and I cannot take more. Perhaps you have forgotten," he replied.

Helen was distinctly annoyed now. The color grew a little warmer in her cheek and her eyes brighter, but she

uttered only a "Thank you," and took up the piece of silver.

Jean Graham, prompted by the Westerner's generous hospitality, and a feeling that she had been overlooked, spoke:

"You have earned a square meal any way, and you're going to get it," she declared. "Sit right down there and we'll have supper when the boys come in."

Uneasily conscious that Helen was watching him, Thurston cast a swift hungry glance at the food. Then, remembering his frayed and tattered garments and the hole in his boot, he answered: "I thank you, but as I must be well on my way to-morrow I cannot stay."

"Then you'll take these along, and eat them when it suits you," said the girl, deftly thrusting a plateful of hot cakes upon him. Divided between gratitude and annoyance, Geoffrey stood still, stupidly holding out the dainties at arm's length, while flavored syrup dripped from them. It was equally impossible to return them without flagrant discourtesy or to retire with any dignity. Finally, he moved out backwards still clutching the plate of cakes, and when he had disappeared Helen laughed softly, while Jean's merriment rang out in rippling tones.

"You saved the situation," said Helen. "It was really getting embarrassing, and he made me ashamed. I ought to have known better than to play that trick with the dollar, but the poor man looked as if he needed it. He is certainly not a hobo, and I could wonder who he is, but that it does not matter, as we shall never see him again."

Meanwhile, Geoffrey Thurston walked savagely down the trail. He felt greatly tempted to hurl the cakes away, but, on second thoughts, ate them instead. It was a trifling decision, but it led to important results, as trifles often do, because, if he had not satisfied his hunger, he would have limped back through the settlement towards the railroad and probably never would have re-entered the

valley. As it was, when the edge of his hunger was blunted he felt drowsy, and, curling himself up among the roots of hemlock, sank into slumber under the open sky. Early next morning Bransome stopped him on the trail.

"I've been thinking over what you told me about making a rock cutting to run the water clear of my meadows," said the rancher, "and if you're still keen on business I'm open to talk to you."

"Why didn't you talk yesterday morning?" inquired Thurston, and Bransome answered frankly: "Well, just then I had my doubts about you; now I figure that if you say you can do a thing, you can. Come over to the ranch, and, if we can't make a deal, I'll give you a week's work, any way"

"Thanks!" replied Thurston. "I should be glad to, but I have some business at the settlement first. Will you advance me a dollar, on account of wages, so that I can discharge a debt to the storekeeper?"

"Why, yes!" agreed the rancher. "But didn't you get a dollar from Graham yesterday? Do you want two?"

"Yes!" said Thurston. "I want two," and Bransome laughed.

"You're in a greater hurry to pay your debts than other folks from your country I've met over here," he observed with a smile. "But come on to the ranch and breakfast; I'll square the storekeeper for you."

Thurston accepted the chance that offered him a sustaining meal, but he did not explain that, owing to some faint trace of superstition in his nature, he intended to keep Helen Savine's dollar. It was the first coin that he had earned as his own master, in the Dominion, and he felt that the successfully-executed contract marked a turning point in his career.

CHAPTER IV

GEOFFREY MAKES PROGRESS

THURSTON did justice to his breakfast at Bransome's ranch, and he frankly informed his host that he had found it difficult to exist on two handfuls of crackers and one of hot corn cakes. When the meal was finished and pipes were lighted, the two men surveyed each other with mutual interest. They were not unlike in physique, for the Colonial, was, as is usual with his kind, lean and wiry. His quick, restless movements suggested nervous energy, but when advisable, he could assume the bovine stolidity which, though foreign to his real nature, the Canadian bushman occasionally adopts for diplomatic purposes. Thurston, however, still retained certain traits of the Insular Briton, including a curtness of speech and a judicious reserve.

"That blame lake backs up on my meadows each time the creek rises," Bransome observed at length. "The snow melts fast in hay-time, and, more often than I like, a freshet harvests my timothy grass for me. Now cutting down three-hundred-foot redwoods is good as exercise, but it gets monotonous, and a big strip of natural prairie would be considerably more useful than a beaver's swimming bath. You said you could blow a channel through the rocks that hold up the outlet, didn't you?"

"I can!" Geoffrey asserted confidently. "From some knowledge of mining I am inclined to think that a series of heavy charges fired simultaneously along the natural cleavage would reduce the lake's level at least a fathom. Have you got a pencil?"

Here it was that the national idiosyncrasies of the men became apparent, for Thurston, leaning on one elbow,

made an elaborate sketch and many calculations with Bransome's pencil. A humming-bird, resplendent in gold and purple, blundered in between the roses shrouding the open window, and hovered for a moment above him on invisible wings. Thurston did not notice the bird, but Bransome flung a crust at it as he smiled on his companion.

"We'll take the figures for granted. Life is too short to worry over them," the rancher said. "Let's get down to business. How much are you asking, no cure no pay, I finding tools and material? I want your bottom price straight away."

Thurston had never done business in so summary a fashion before, but he could adapt himself to circumstances, and he mentioned a moderate sum forthwith.

"Can't come down?—then it's a deal!" Bransome announced. "Contract—this is the Pacific slope, and we've no time for such foolery. I'm figuring that I can trust you, and my word's good enough in this locality. Run that pond down a fathom and you'll get your money. Any particular reason why you shouldn't start in to-day? Don't know of any? Then put that pipe in your pocket, and we'll strike out for the store at the settlement now."

So it came about that at sunset Geoffrey was deposited with several bags of provisions, a blanket, and a litter of tools, outside a ruined shack on the edge of the natural prairie surrounding Bransome's lake. He had elected to live beside his work.

A tall forest of tremendous growth walled the lake, and then for a space rotting trees and willow swale showed where the intermittent rise of waters had set a limit to the all-encroaching bush. The wail of a loon rang eerily out of the shadow, and was answered by the howl of a distant wolf. A thin silver crescent sailed clear of the fretted minarets of towering firs clear cut against a pale pearl of the sky.

"Carlton's prairie, we call it," said Bransome, leaning

against his light wagon, which stood near the deserted dwelling. "Land which isn't all rock or forest is mighty scarce, and Carlton figured he'd done great things when he bought this place. Five years he tried to drain it, working night and day, and pouring good money into it, and five times the freshets washed out his crops for him. The creek just laughed at his ditches. Then when he'd no more money he went out to help track-laying, and a big tree flattened him. The boys said he didn't seem very sorry. This prairie had broken his heart for him, and I've heard the Siwash say he still comes back and digs at nights when the moon is full."

"Carlton made a mistake," said Geoffrey, who had been examining the surroundings rather than listening to the tale. "He began in what looked the easiest and was the hardest way. He should have cut the mother rock instead of trenching the forest." When Bransome drove away Thurston rolled himself in the thick brown blanket, and sank into slumber under the lee of the dead man's dwelling, through which a maple tree had grown from the inside, wrenching off the shingle roof.

An owl that circled about the crumbling house, stooped now and then on muffled wing to inspect the sleeper. Once a stealthy panther, slipping through the willows, bared its fangs and passed the other way, and the pale green points of luminescence that twinkled in the surrounding bush, and were the eyes of timber wolves, faded again. Neither did the deer that panther and wolves sought, come down to feed on the swamp that night, for a man, holding dominion over the beasts of the forest, lay slumbering in the desolate clearing.

Geoffrey began work early next day, and afterwards week by week toiled from dawn until nearly sunset, blasting clear minor reefs and ledges until he attacked the mother rock under the lip of a clashing fall. The fee promised was by no means large, and, because current wages prohibited assistance, he did all the work himself.

So he shoveled débris and drilled holes in the hard blue grit; and drilling, single-handed, is a difficult operation, damaging to the knuckles of the man attempting it. He waded waist-deep in water, learned to carry heavy burdens on his shoulder, and found his interest in the task growing upon him. He felt that much depended upon the successful completion of his contract. It was not, however, all monotonous labor, and there were compensations, for, after each day's toil was done, he lay prone on scented pine twigs, and heard the voices of the bush break softly through the solemn hush as, through gradations of fading glories along the lofty snows, night closed in. He would watch the black bear grubbing hog-fashion among the tall wild cabbage, while the little butter duck, paddling before its brood, set divergent lines creeping across the steely lake until the shadows of the whitened driftwood broke and quivered.

Sometimes he would call the chipmunks, which scurried up and down behind him, or tap on a rotten log until a crested woodpecker cried in answer, and by degrees the spell of the mountains gained upon him, until he forgot his troubles and became no more subject to fits of berserk rage. He was growing quiet and more patient, learning to wait, but his energy and determination still remained. But he was not wholly cut off from human intercourse, for at times some of the scattered ranchers would ride over to offer impracticable advice or to predict his failure, and Geoffrey listened quietly, answering that in time it would be proved which was right. Sometimes, he tramped through scented shadow to Graham's homestead and discussed crops and cattle with the rancher. On these occasions, he had long conversations with Helen Savine, who, finding no person of liberal education thereabouts, was pleased to talk to him. There was nothing incongruous in this, for petty class distinctions vanish in the bush, where, when his daily task is done, the hired man meets his master on terms of equality.

At last the day on which Thurston's work was to be practically tested arrived, and most of the ranchers drove over to witness what they regarded as a reckless experiment.

Jean Graham and Helen Savine stood a little apart from the rest on the edge of the forest looking down on the glancing water and talking with the experimenter. The rich wet meadows were heavy with flag and blossom to the edge of the driftwood frieze, and the splash of rising trout alone disturbed the reflection of the mighty trunks and branches crowning a promontory on the farther side.

"It is very beautiful, and now you are going to spoil it all, Mr. Bransome," said Helen.

The rancher glanced at her with admiration in his eyes. Helen was worthy of inspection. Her thin summer dress, with the cluster of crimson roses tucked into the waist of it, brought out her rich beauty which betokened a Latin ancestry.

"Yes, it's mighty pretty; a picture worth looking at—all of it," he said, and there was a faint smile on Helen's lips as she recognized that the general tribute to the picturesque was as far as Bransome dared venture in the direction of a compliment. He was not a diffident person, but he felt a wholesome respect for Helen Savine.

"Mighty pretty, but what's the good of it, and I'm not farming for my health," he continued. "It's just a beautiful wilderness, and what has a man brains given him for, unless it's to turn the wilderness into cheese and butter. It has broken one man's heart, and my thick-headed neighbors said a swamp it would remain forever, but a stranger with ideas came along, and I told him, 'Sail ahead.'"

"I did hear you told him not to be a—perhaps I had better say—a simple fool," Helen answered mischievously; and Bransome coughed before he made reply.

"Maybe!" he acknowledged. "I didn't know him

then, but to-day I'm ready to back that man to put through just whatever he sets his mind upon."

As Bransome spoke, the subject of this encomium came up from the little gorge by the lake outlet, and it struck Helen Savine that the rock worker had changed to advantage since she first saw him. His keen eyes, which she had noticed were quick to flash with anger, had grown more kindly and the bronzed face was more reposeful. The thin jean garments and great knee boots, which had no longer any rents in them, suited the well-proportioned frame.

"I was disappointed about the electric firing gear ordered from Vancouver, but I think the coupled time-fuses should serve almost as well," said Thurston, acknowledging Helen's presence with a bow that was significant. "You appear interested, Miss Savine. We are trusting to the shock of a number of charges fired simultaneously, and perhaps you had better retire nearer the bush, for the blast will be powerful. I should like your good wishes, since you are in a measure responsible for this venture. You will remember you gave me my first commission."

"You have them!" said Helen, with a frank sincerity, for though the man was a mere enterprising laborer, she was too proud to assume any air of condescension. She was Helen Savine, and considered that she had no need to maintain her dignity.

Geoffrey returned a conventional answer, and there was a buzz of voices as he and Bransome walked back together towards the gorge. The rancher halted discreetly when his companion, taking a brand from a fire near it, clambered over the boulders. Geoffrey disappeared among the rocks, and the voices grew louder when he came into view again walking hurriedly.

Several trails of thin blue vapor began to crawl in and out among the rocks. Bransome joined Thurston, and both men broke into a smart trot. They were heading for the bush until Geoffrey, halting near it, ran back at

full speed towards the gorge. All who watched him were astonished, for they were already bracing themselves to face the heavy shock.

"He's mad—stark mad!" roared Graham. "Come back for your life, Bransome. It's smashed into small pieces both of you will be," and the eyes of the spectators grew wide as they watched the two running figures, for the rancher also had turned, and the lines of vapor were creeping with ominous swiftness across the face of the stone.

There was a roar as the behind man clutched at the other, missed him, and staggered several paces, leaving his hat behind him before he took up the chase again. Single cries sharper than the rest rose out of the clamor, "Blown to glory both of them! Two sticks of giant powder in most of the holes. All that's left of the Britisher won't be worth picking up!"

The two men disappeared among the boulders almost under the white foam of the fall, and for a brief space there was heavy silence emphasized by the song of hurrying water and the drumming of a blue-grouse on the summit of a fir. Helen Savine fancied she could hear the assembly breathing unevenly, and felt a pricking among the roots of her hair, while she struggled with an impulse which prompted her to cry aloud or in any wild fashion to break the torturing suspense. Jean Graham, whose eyes were wide with apprehension, noted that her face was bloodless to the lips. Neither had as yet been rudely confronted with tragedy, and both felt held fast, spellbound, without the power to move.

"The Lord have mercy on them," said the hoarse voice of a man somewhere behind the girls.

Once more a murmur swelled into a roar, and Jean, twining her brown fingers together, cried, "There! They're coming. They may be in time!"

A figure, apparently Bransome's, leaped down from a boulder close in front of one that climbed over the stone,

and there followed harsh, breathless cries of encouragement as the two headed at mad speed for the sheltering forest, the rear runner, who came up with hands clenched and long swinging strides, gaining steadily on the one before him. They were near enough for those who watched to see that the fear of sudden death was stamped upon their perspiring faces. Then, as they passed a spur of rock out-crop, Thurston leaped upon the leader, hurled him forward so that he lost his balance and the pair went down out of sight among the rocks, while a shaft of radiance pale in the sunlight blazed aloft beside the outlet of the lake. Thick yellow-tinted vapor followed it, and hillside and forest rang to the shock of a stunning detonation.

The smoke curling in filmy wreaths spread itself across the quaggy meadows, while the patter of falling fragments filled the quivering bush, and was mingled with a loud splashing, or a heavy crash as some piece of greater weight drove hurtling through the trees or plunged into the lake. Then for the last time the assembly gave voice, raising a tumultuous cheer of relief as the two men came forth uninjured out of the eddying smoke.

Geoffrey, shaking the dust from his garments, turned to his companion with a somewhat nervous laugh:

"We cut it rather fine," he said, "but I felt reasonably sure there would be just sufficient time, and it might have spoiled the whole blast if the two bad fuses had failed to fire their shots. Of course, I'm grateful for your company, but as it was my particular business I don't quite see why you turned back after me."

Bransome, who mopped his forehead, stared at the speaker with some wonder and more admiration before he answered:

"There's a good deal of cast iron about you, and I guess I'd a long way sooner have trusted the rest than have gone back to stir up those two charges. What took me?—well, I figured you had turned suddenly crazy, and I was in a way responsible for you. Made the best bargain for your

time I could, but I didn't buy you up bones and body—see?"

"I think I do," answered Geoffrey, and that was all, but it meant the recognition of a bond between them. Bransome, as if glad to change the subject, asked:

"Say, after you had fired the fuse what did you waste precious seconds looking for? If I wasn't too scared to notice anything clearly I'd swear you found something and picked it up."

"I did!" declared Geoffrey, smiling. "It was something I must have dropped before. Only a trifle, but I would not like to lose it, and—I had one eye on the fuses—there seemed a second or two to spare. However, for some reason my throat feels all stuck together. Have you any cider in your wagon?"

Half-an-hour later, when most of the spectators stood watching the released waters thunder down the gorge, for the blast had been successful, Helen Savine said:

"I don't quite understand what happened, Mr. Bransome."

"It was this way!" answered the rancher, glad to profit by any opportunity of interesting the girl. "That Thurston is a hard, tough man. Two fuses that were to fire small charges petered out, and sooner than risk anything he must light them again. I don't quite understand all the rest of it, either, for he's not a mean man, and why he should stay fooling on top of a powder mine looking for one dollar when I've a hatful to pay him is away beyond me. Yet I'm sure he picked up a piece of silver just before we ran. Curious kind of creature, isn't he?"

Helen thought the incident distinctly odd. She could not comprehend why a man should risk his life for the sake of a silver coin. She could not find a solution of the mystery until it was explained that evening.

Geoffrey Thurston, attired in white shirt, black sash, and new store clothes, had tramped over to Graham's ranch and by degrees he and Miss Savine gravitated

away from the others. They were interested in subjects that did not appeal to the rest, and, though Jean smiled mischievously at times, this excited no comment.

Clear moonlight sparkled upon the untrodden snows above them, snows that had remained stainless since the giant peaks were framed when the world was young. The pines were black on their lower slopes, and white mists filled the valley, out of which the song of the river rose in long reverberations. Geoffrey and Helen leaned on the veranda balustrade, both silent, for the solemnity of the mountains impressed them, and speech seemed superfluous.

After a while, the girl told Geoffrey that he ought to be glad to live after his narrow escape from death. "There was really no great risk, and, if there had been, the results would have justified it," Geoffrey replied. "The failure of two charges might have spoiled all my work for me. Since I left you the Roads and Trails Surveyor voluntarily offered me a rock work contract he had refused before, and I at once accepted it."

"You have not been used to this laborious life. Have you no further ambition, and do you like it?" asked Helen, flashing a quick glance at him.

"It is not exactly what I expected, but as there appears to be no great demand in this country for mental abilities, one is glad to earn a living as one can," he said. "I am afraid I am a somewhat ambitious person. I consider this only the beginning, and Miss Savine responsible for it. You will remember who it was offered me my first contract."

"Don't!" commanded Helen, averting her eyes. "That is hardly fair or civil. You really looked so—and how was I to know?"

Geoffrey's pulse beat faster, and the smile faded out of his eyes as he noticed, for the moon was high, the trace of faintly heightened color in the speaker's face.

"I doubtless looked the hungry, worn-out tramp I was," he interposed gravely. "And out of gentle compassion,

you offered me a dollar. Well, I earned that dollar, and I have it still. It has brought me good luck, and I will keep it as a talisman."

Instinctively his fingers slid to one end of a thin gold chain, and for a moment a look of consternation came into his face, for the links hung loose; then as the hard hand dropped to his pocket, he looked relieved and Helen found it judicious to watch a gray blur of shadow moving across the snow. She had sometimes wondered what he wore at one end of that cross-pattern chain, for rock cutters do not usually adorn themselves with such trinkets, but, remembering Bransome's comments, she now understood what had happened just before the explosion. Geoffrey's quick eyes had noticed something unusual in her air, and his old reckless spirit, breaking through all restraint, prompted him to say:

"It will, I fancy, still bring me good fortune. I come of a superstitious race, and nothing would tempt me to part with it. This, as I said, is only the beginning. It appeared impossible to move the boulder from your wagon trail, and I did it. The neighbors declared nobody could drain Bransome's prairie, and a number of goodly acres are drying now, while to-night I feel it may be possible to go on and on, until——"

"Does not that sound somewhat egotistical?" interposed Helen.

"Horribly," said Thurston, with a curious smile. "But you see I am trusting in the talisman, and some day I may ask you to admit that I have made it good. I'm not avaricious, and desire money only as means to an end. Dollars! If all goes well, the contract for the wagon road rock work should bring me in a good many of them."

"You are refreshingly certain," averred Helen. "But will the end or dominant purpose justify all this?"

Thurston answered quietly:

"I may ask you to judge that, also, some day!"

Helen was conscious of a chagrin quite unusual to her.

Hitherto, she had experienced little difficulty in making the men she knew regret anything that resembled presumption, but with this man it was different. What he meant she would not at the moment ask herself, but, though she rather admired his quietly confident tone, it nettled her, and yet, without begging an awkward question she could not resent it. Geoffrey's reckless frankness was often more unassailable than wiser men's diplomacy—and she was certainly pleased that he had recovered the dollar.

"The dew is getting heavy, and I promised Jean some instruction in netting," she told him rather unsteadily. She paused a second, and, with an assumed carelessness, added, "isn't it useless to forecast the future?"

CHAPTER V

THE LEGENDS OF CROSBIE GHYLL

HELEN SAVINE had passed two years in England, and, because her father was a prosperous man who humored her slightest wishes, she occasionally returned to take her pleasure in what she called the Old Country. It is a far cry from the snowy heights of the Pacific slope to the pleasant valleys of the North Country, but in these days of quadruple-expansion engines, distance counts but little when one has sufficient money.

The Atlantic express had brought Helen and her aunt by marriage, Mrs. Thomas P. Savine, into Montreal, whence a fast train had conveyed them to New York in time to catch a big Southampton liner, but Mrs. Savine was a restless lady, and had grown tired of London within six weeks from the day she left Vancouver. She was an American, and took pains to impress the fact upon anybody who mistook her for a Canadian, and, finding a party of her countrymen and women, whom she had hoped to overtake in the metropolis, had departed northwards, she determined to follow them to the English lakes.

"It's a big, hot, dusty wilderness, Tom, and we've seen all they've got to show us here before," she said to her long-suffering husband, as she stood in the vestibule of a fashionable hotel. "Say, we'll pull out to-day and catch the Schroeders' party meditating around Wordsworth's tomb. Young man, will you kindly get us a railroad schedule?"

The silver-buttoned official, who watched the big plate-glass door, started at a smart rap on his shoulder, and blinked at the angular lady in a startling costume and a blue veil. Thomas Savine interposed meekly:

"A time-table; and that's evidently not the man to ask, my dear."

"Then he can tell the right one," Mrs. Savine answered airily, and presently halted before a row of resplendently-gilded books adorning one portion of the vestibule. She thereupon explained for the benefit of all listeners that it was hard to see the necessity for so many railways in so small a country, and finally, with a clerk's assistance, selected a train which would deposit her at Oxenholme, from which place the official suggested that she might find means of transport into the district in which, to the best of his belief, Coleridge and Wordsworth, or one of them, wrote what Mrs. Savine entitled charming little pieces. It proved good counsel, and two of the party passed a delightful week at Ambleside, where their sojourn was marred only by Mrs. Savine's laments that potatoes were not served at supper and breakfast.

"I want some potatoes with my ham," she said, and when the attendant explained that the vegetables were never eaten in England at that meal, she inquired, "Don't you grow potatoes anywhere in this country?"

The attendant said that very fine ones were produced in the immediate vicinity, and Mrs. Savine waved a jeweled hand majestically.

"Then away you go and buy some. I'll sit right here until they're boiled," she said.

"It really isn't the custom, and you know you never got them in London, and hardly ate them at home," said Thomas Savine, but Mrs. Savine remained superior to such reasoning.

"That's quite outside the question. I want those potatoes, and I'm going to have them," she insisted.

There was a whispering at the end of the breakfast hall, somebody whistled up a tube, and the hotel manager appeared to announce, with regrets, that it was unfortunately impossible in the busy season to upset the culinary arrangements for the benefit of a single guest.

"Then we'll start again and follow the Schrœders' trail to that place in Cumberland," Mrs. Savine decided. "Tom, you go out and buy one of those twenty five cent guide-books which tell you all about everything. Hire some ponies and a man, and we'll drive a straight line across the mountains."

The manager respectfully suggested it would be better to take the train, even though the railway went round, because the mountains were lofty, and the roads were indifferent in the region traversed. To this the lady answered with some truth that the highest peak in Britain was a pigmy to the lowest of the Selkirks, and that she had spent two summers camping among the fastnesses of the snow-clad Olympians.

"Your aunt is a smart woman, but she can't help upsetting things," said Thomas Savine, when his niece went out with him to make arrangements for the trip. Helen smiled pleasantly, for she knew her aunt's good qualities, and also she was fond of adventurous wanderings.

It was perfect weather, and the three tourists enjoyed their journey among the less frequented fells, during which they camped, so Thomas Savine termed it, each night in some high-perched hostelry or trout-fisher's haunt. Helen realized that never before had she fully appreciated the beauty of England. Quite apart from its wonders of industrial enterprise, tide of world-wide commerce, and treasury of literature and art, the old country was to be loved for its quiet, green restfulness, she thought.

Suddenly there came a change. A south-wester drove thick rain-clouds scudding across peak and valley, and filled the passes with dank, white mists from the Irish Sea, and so, towards the close of a threatening day, Mrs. Savine's party came winding down in a hurry from a bare hill shoulder and under the gray crags of Crosbie Fell. The hollows beneath them were lost in a woolly vapor, low-flying scud raked the bare ridges above, and even as they

passed a black rift in the hillside the first heavy drops of rain fell pattering. Helen Savine had seen many a mining adit in British Columbia, and, turning to glance at the mouth of the tunnel, she read, scratched on the rock beside it, "Thurston's Folly." That careless glance over her shoulder was to lead to important results.

"There's wild weather brewing," said Thomas Savine. "Make those ponies rustle, and we'll get in somewhere before it comes along."

When they reached the little wind-swept village, it became evident that no shelter for the night could be found there, for it was seldom that even an enterprising pedestrian tourist came down from the high moors behind Crosbie Fell. Still, one inhabitant informed their guide, in a tongue none of the others could comprehend, that if he was in an unusually good humor old Musker, the keeper, might take them in at Crosbie Ghyll. Thus it happened that just as the rain began in earnest, such a cavalcade as had probably never before passed its gloomy portals rode up to the gate of the dilapidated edifice. Some of the iron-bound barriers still lay moldering in the hollow of the arch, and Helen noticed slits for muskets in the stout walls above, for the owners had been a fighting race, and several times in bygone centuries the tide of battle had rolled about and then had ebbed away from the stubbornly-held stronghold. The observer had gathered so much from a paragraph in her guide-book.

The romance of English history appealed to Helen as it does to the citizens of the wider Britain over seas, and she turned in her saddle to look about her. Framed by the weather-worn archway she could see the black rampart of the fells fading into the rain, and the bare sweep of moss and moor, which had once stretched unbroken to the feet of the great ranges above the Solway shore. Inside the quadrangle, for the place had during the past century served as farm instead of hall, barn, cart-shed and shippon were ruinous and empty, but she could fill the space

in fancy with sturdy archer, man-at-arms, and corsleted rider, for that the present venerable edifice had been built into an older one the stump of a square tower remained to testify.

Thomas Savine pounded on the oaken door at one end of the courtyard until it was opened by a bent-shouldered man with frosted hair and wrinkled visage.

"We are unfortunate strangers with a guide who has lost his way, and it would be a favor if you could take us in to-night out of the storm," he said. The older man glanced at the party suspiciously.

"If you ride straight on across the moor you'll find a road, and a brand new hotel in twelve miles, where you'll get whatever you have been used to," he said. "I once took some London folks in, and after the thanks they gave me I never will again."

"We're not Londoners, only forlorn Canadians," explained Thomas Savine. "Never mind, Matilda; he'll find out that you're an American in due time. We have all learned to rough it in our own country, and would trouble you very little."

"What part of Canada?" asked the forbidding figure in the doorway, and when Savine answered, "British Columbia," called "Margery!" A little weazened woman, with cheeks still ruddy from much lashing of the wind, appeared in the portal.

"Strangers from British Columbia! Perhaps they know the master," said the man, and there was a whispering until the woman vanished, saying, "I'll ask Miss Gracie."

She returned promptly, and, with a reserved courtesy, bade the party enter. Then she sent her husband and the guide to stable the ponies, and fifteen minutes later the travelers reassembled beside the deep-seated window of a great stone-flagged room, darkly wainscoted, which apparently once had been the hall, and was now kitchen.

There were a spotless cloth and neat cutlery on the table by the window; trout and bacon, hacked from the sides hanging beneath the smoke-blackened beams, frizzled upon a peat fire; and, though she found neither wine nor potatoes, Mrs. Savine said that she had not enjoyed such a meal since she left Vancouver.

"We can't give you a sitting-room to yourselves," apologized the withered dame as she removed the cloth. "What furniture there is above is covered up, and it will be ill finding you sleeping quarters even. Nobody lives here beside ourselves, except when Mr. Forsyth comes down for a few weeks' shooting. His wife was a Thurston, and he bought the old place to please her sooner than let it go out of the family."

"A Thurston!" said Helen Savine. "We saw 'Thurston's Folly' written beside a mining tunnel on the fell. Was that one of the former owners? Being Colonials we are interested in all ancient buildings and their traditions."

"Oh, yes!" broke in Mrs. Savine. "We just love to hear about wicked barons and witches and all those quaint folk of the olden time."

Musker had drawn nearer meanwhile, and Thomas Savine held out the cigar case that lay upon his knee. "If we may smoke in the great hearth there, just help yourself," said he. "My wife is fond of antiquities, and if you have any to talk of, we should be glad of your company."

Musker glanced keenly at his guests. Though, having lived elsewhere, he spoke easy colloquial English, he was a son of the North Country dogged and slow, intensely self-respecting, and, while loyal with feudal fealty to superiors he knew, quick to resent a stranger's assumption of authority. Thomas Savine, brown-faced, vigorous, a pleasant Colonial gentleman, smiled upon him good-naturedly, and Musker took a cigar awkwardly. Mrs. Sa-

vine surveyed the great bare hall with respectful curiosity and evident interest, while Helen, visibly interested, leaned back in her chair.

"Maybe you met the master in British Columbia?" Musker hazarded with an eager look in his dim eyes.

"What is his full name, and what is he like?" asked Helen, bending forward a little. The old woman, reaching over, lifted a faded photograph from the window seat.

"Geoffrey Thurston!" she answered. "That was him when he was young. My husband yonder broke the pony in."

Helen started as she gazed at the picture of the boy and the pony. The face was like, and yet unlike, that of the gaunt and hungry man whom she had first seen sitting upon the fallen fir. "Yes," she answered gravely; "I know him. I met Mr. Thurston in British Columbia."

"We would take it very kindly if you would tell us how and where you found him, miss," said Musker in haste.

"I found him in a great Canadian forest. He was looking very worn and tired," Helen answered, with a trace of color in her face. "I—I hired him to do some work for me, and it was hard work—much harder than I fancied—but he did it, and, as we afterwards discovered, spent all I paid him on the powder he found was necessary."

"Ay," said the old man. "That was Mr. Geoffrey. They were all hard and ill to beat, the Thurstons of Crosbie. And you'll kindly tell us, miss, you saw him again?"

"Yes," repeated Helen, "I saw him again. By good fortune the work he did for me procured him a contract he carried out daringly, and when I last saw him he was no longer hungry or ragged, but, I fancy, on the way to win success as an engineer."

Musker straightened his bent shoulders and smiled a slow, almost reluctant smile of pride, while his wife's eyes

were grateful as she fixed them on the speaker. "Ay! What Mr. Geoffrey sets his heart on he'll win or ruin himself over. It was the way of all of them; and this is gradely news," he told her.

"Now," said Helen, nodding towards him graciously, "we don't wish to be unduly inquisitive, but—if you may tell us—why did Mr. Thurston emigrate to Canada?"

Musker was evidently tempted to embark upon a favorite topic, and his wife went out hurriedly. But he hesitated, sitting silent for a minute or two. Savine, rising under the arch of the great hearth, flung his cigar into the fire, as a young woman, wearing what Helen noticed was a decidedly antiquated riding habit, came forward out of the shadows.

"I hope we are not intruding here," said the Canadian. "We were tired out before the rain came down, and almost afraid to cross the moor."

"You are very welcome," said the stranger. "I am not, however, mistress, only a relative of the old place's owner, and, therefore, a kinswoman of Geoffrey Thurston. I heard that you had shown him a passing kindness, and should like to thank you."

There was no apparent reason why the two young women should scrutinize each other, and yet both did so by the fading daylight and red blaze of the fire. Helen saw that the stranger was ruddy and blonde—frank by nature and impulsive, she imagined. The stranger noted only that the Colonial was pale and dark and comely, with a slightly imperious presence, and a face that it was not easy to read.

"I am Marian Thwaite of Barrow Hall, and regret I cannot stay any longer, having three miles to ride in the rain," she said. "Still, I may return to-morrow before you set out. Mrs. Forsyth will be pleased if she hears you have made these Canadian strangers comfortable, Musker, and I think you may tell them why Mr. Geoffrey left England. May I ask your names?"

Helen told her, and after Miss Thwaite departed, Musker began the story of Thurston's Folly. It had grown quite dark. Driving rain lashed the windows. The ancient building was filled with strange rumblings and the wailing of the blast when the old man concluded: "Mr. Geoffrey was too proud to turn a swindler, and that was why he shook off his sweetheart, who tried to persuade him, though he knew old Anthony Thurston would have left him his money, if they married."

"Some said it was the opposite," interposed his wife; but Musker answered angrily, "Then they didn't tell it right. No woman born could twist Geoffrey Thurston from his path, and when she gave him bad counsel he turned his back on her. A fool these dolts called him. He was a leal, hard man, and what was a light woman's greediness to him?"

"And what became of the lady?" asked Helen, with a curious flash in her eyes.

"She married a London man, who came here shooting, married him out of spite, and has rued it many times if the tales are true. She was down with him fishing, looking sour and pale, and the Hall maids were saying——"

"Just gossip and lies!" broke in his spouse; and Helen, who apparently had lapsed into a disdainful indifference, asked no further questions. Mrs. Savine, however, made many inquiries, and Musker, who became unusually communicative, presently offered to show the strangers what he called the armory.

They followed him down a draughty corridor to the black-wainscoted gun-room at the base of the crumbling tower, and when he had lighted a lamp its glow revealed a modern collection of costly guns. There were also trout-rods hung upon the wall, and a few good sporting etchings, at all of which Musker glanced somewhat contemptuously. "These are Mr. Forsyth's, and I take care of them, but he only belongs to the place by purchase and

marriage. Those belonged to the Thurstons—the old, dead Thurstons—and they hunted men," he said.

He ran the lamp up higher by a tarnished brass chain, and pointed first to a big moldering bow. "A Thurston drew that in France long ago, and it has splitted many an Annandale cattle thief in the Solway mosses since. Red Geoffrey carried this long spear, and, so the story goes, won his wife with it, and brought her home on the crupper from beside the Nith. She pined away and died just above where we stand now in this very tower. That was another Geoffrey's sword; they hanged him high outside Lancaster jail. He was for Prince Charlie, and cut down single-handed two of King George's dragoons carrying a warrant for a friend's arrest when the Prince's cause was lost. His wife, she poisoned herself. Those are the spurs Mad Harry rode Hellfire on a wager down Crosbie Ghyll with, and broke his neck doing it, besides his young wife's heart. The women who married the Thurstons had an ill lot to grapple with. Even when they settled down to farming, the Thurstons were men who would walk unflinchingly into ruin sooner than lose their grip on their purpose, and Mr. Geoffrey favors them."

"They must have been just lovely," sighed Mrs. Savine. "Say, I've taken a fancy to some of those old things. That rusty iron lamp can't be much use to anybody, but it's quaint, and I'd give it's weight in dollars for it. Can't you tell me where Mr. Forsyth lives?"

Musker stared at her horrified, Thomas Savine laughed, and even Helen, who had appeared unusually thoughtful, smiled. Musker answered:

"No money could buy one of them out of the family, and if any but a Thurston moves that lamp from where it hangs the dead men rise and come for it when midnight strikes. It is falling to pieces, but once when they took it to Kendal, to be mended, the smith sent a man back with it on horseback before the day had broken."

There was a few moments' silence when Musker con-

cluded, and the ancient weapons glinted strangely as the lamp's flame wavered in the chilling draughts. A gale from the Irish Sea boomed about the crumbling tower, and all the lonely mosses seemed to swell it with their moaning. Helen shivered as she listened, for those clamorous voices of wind and rain carried her back in fancy to the old unhappy days of bloodshed and foray. The associations of the place oppressed her. She had acquired a horror of those grim dead men whose mementos hung above her, and whose spirits might well wander on such a night vainly seeking rest. Even Mrs. Savine became subdued, and her husband said:

"We can't tell tales like these in our country, and I'm thankful we can't. Still, I daresay it was such men as these who bred in us the grit to chase the whales in the Arctic, build our railroads through the snow-barred passes, and master the primeval forest. Now we'll try to forget them, and go back out of this creepy place to the fire again."

An hour later Mrs. Musker escorted Helen to her quarters. A bright fire glowed in the rusty grate, and two candles burned on the dressing-table. "It's Mrs. Forsyth's own room, and the best in the house," the old caretaker assured the girl. "Musker has been telling you about the old Thurstons. He's main proud of them, but you needn't fear them—it's long since the last one walked. You have a kind heart, and nothing evil dare hurt you. See! I've tried to make you comfortable. You were kind to the old place's real master—many a time I've nursed him—God bless you!"

Helen was not in the least afraid of the dead Thurstons. She was filled with the common-sense courage which characterizes the inhabitants of her new country, but she had been affected by the stories, and she sat for a time with her feet on the hearth irons, gazing thoughtfully into the blaze. She had met a modern Thurston, and found the instincts of his forbears strong within him.

She considered that strength, courage, and resolution well became a man, but that gentleness and chivalrous respect for women were desirable attributes, too. The Thurstons, however, had taken to bloodshed as a pastime, and broken most of their wives' hearts until it seemed that they had brought a curse upon their race. She suspected there was a measure of their brutality in the one she knew. Remembering something Geoffrey once had said, her face grew flushed and she clenched a little hand with an angry gesture, saying, "No man shall ever make a slave of me, and my husband, if I have one, must be my servant before he is my master."

Thereupon she dismissed the subject, tried to blot the stories from her memory, and presently buried her ears in the pillow to shut out the clamor of the storm. After a sound night's slumber, and an interview with Miss Thwaite she resumed her journey next morning.

Musker stood in the gate to watch the party ride away, and glancing at the coins in his hand said to Margery, "I wish they'd come often. Main interested in my stories they were all of them, and it's double what any of the shooting folks ever gave me. This one came from the young lady, and there's a way about her that puzzles me after seeing her."

CHAPTER VI

MILLICENT'S REWARD

THE late Autumn evening was closing in. Millicent Leslie stood out on the terrace of the old North Country hall, where, the year before, she had first met her husband. A pale moon had climbed above the high black ridge of moor, which shut in one end of the valley, and the big beech wood that rolled down the lower hillside had faded to a shadowy blur, but she could still see the dim, white road running straight between the hedgerows, and could catch the faint gleam of a winding river. Twilight and night were meeting and melting into each other, the dew lay heavy upon the last of the dahlias beneath the terrace wall, and there was a chill of frost in the air. It was very still, though now and then the harsh call of a pheasant came up faintly through the murmur of the river from the depths of the wood. Millicent could hear no other sound, though she strained her ears to listen and it seemed to her that the rattle of wheels should carry far down the silent valley.

She was waiting somewhat anxiously for the return of her husband, who had set off that morning with three or four other men to walk certain distant stubble and turnip fields for partridges. They had passed a week at the hall, for, although Millicent would have preferred to avoid that particular place, Leslie had said he did not know of any other place where one could obtain rough shooting, as well as a more or less congenial company, in return for what was little more than a first-class hotel bill. He had also added that he needed a holiday, in which Millicent had agreed with him. There was no doubt that he had looked jaded and harassed.

Millicent knew little about her husband's business, except that it was connected with stocks and shares, and the flotation of companies; but she was quite aware that he had met with a serious reverse soon after he married her, since it had been necessary for them to give up their town house and install themselves temporarily in a London flat. Leslie had informed her that reverses were not uncommon in his profession, and he had appeared quite convinced of his ability to recover his losses in a new venture which had something to do with South African gold or diamonds. Of late, however, he had grown dejected and moody. On the previous evening she had seen his face set hard, as he read a letter which bore the London postmark. He had not given her any information about the contents of the letter, for there had been no great measure of confidence between them; but there were one or two telegrams for him among those a groom had brought over from the nearest station during the day, and she felt a little uneasy as she thought of them.

By and by, with a little shiver and a suppressed sigh, she glanced up at the highest part of the climbing wood. It was there she had had her last memorable interview with Geoffrey, almost a year ago. Though she had not cared to face the fact, she was troubled by a suspicion that she had made an unwise choice then. Leslie had changed since their marriage. He was harsh at times, and though he had, even in their more humble quarters, surrounded her with a certain amount of luxury, there was a laxity in his manners and conversation that jarred upon her. Geoffrey, she remembered, had not been addicted to mincing words, but, at least, he had lived in accordance with a Spartan moral code. Millicent was not a scrupulous woman, and her ideas of ethical justice were rudimentary, but she possessed in place of a conscience a delicate sense of refinement which her husband frequently offended.

Feeling chilly at length, and seeing no sign of the shooter's return, Millicent went back into the house. She

stopped when she reached the square entrance hall which served the purpose of a lounging-room. The hall had been rudely ceiled and paneled at a time when skilled craftsmen were scarce in the North Country, and in the daylight it was more or less dim and forbidding, but with the lamps lighted and a fire blazing in the wide, old-fashioned hearth, the place looked invitingly comfortable. When she entered, Millicent was not altogether pleased to see another woman there. Marian Thwaite, whom she knew but had not expected to meet, lay in a big chair near the fire. The glow of health which the keen air of the moors had brought there was in her face. She wore heavy boots and severely simple walking attire. Her features suggested a decided character, and she had unwavering blue eyes.

"Mrs. Boone won't be down for some minutes, and I believe the rest are dressing," Marian said. "I haven't seen you since your marriage, and to tell the truth, you're not looking by any means as fresh as you did before you left us. I suppose it's one effect of living in London?"

She studied Millicent with a steady contemplative gaze, and there was no doubt that her comment was justified. Millicent's face was pallid, there was a certain weariness in her eyes, and on the whole, her expression was languidly querulous.

"I didn't know you were coming to-night," said Millicent, as she sank into a chair.

"I didn't know it myself," Marian explained. "I was out on the fells, and I met Boone as I came down this way. He said somebody would drive me home, if I'd stay. You have been here a week, haven't you? How is it you haven't come over to see us yet?"

"As a matter of fact, I didn't intend to call, and it was rather against my wishes that we came up here," said Millicent with the candor of an old acquaintance. "You were not very cordial when I last saw you, and I can't

help a feeling that you are all of you prejudiced against me."

Quite unembarrassed Marian looked at her with a reflective air. "Yes," she admitted, "to some extent that's true. We're closely connected with the Thurstons, and I've no doubt we make rather intolerant partisans. After all, it's only natural that we sympathize with Geoffrey. Besides—you can make what you like of it—he was always a favorite of mine. I suppose you haven't heard from him since he went to Canada?"

"Would you have expected him to write?"

Marian smiled. "Perhaps it would have been unreasonable, but taking it for granted that he hasn't been communicative, I've a piece of news for you. Some Canadian tourists stayed a night at the Ghyll, two or three months ago, and it seems they met him in British Columbia. I understand he is by no means prosperous, but at least getting a footing in the country, and the people apparently have rather a high opinion of him. Did I mention that one of the party was a girl?"

She saw the quickened interest in Millicent's eyes. With assumed indifference in her voice Millicent asked: "What kind of people were they?"

"The girl was handsome—well-finished, too. In fact, she struck me as rather an imperious young person of some consequence in the place she came from. She would pass in any circle that you or I are likely to get an entry to. I don't know whether it's significant, but I understand from Margery that she took some interest in Musker's stories of the Thurstons."

There was nothing to show whether Millicent was pleased with this or not. She did not speak for a moment or two.

"Did they mention what Geoffrey had been doing?" she inquired presently.

"Chopping down trees for sawmills, or something of the kind. The man said Geoffrey had evidently been

what they call 'up against it' until lately when he seems to have got upon his feet. It will probably convince you that you were perfectly right in not marrying him."

This time Millicent laughed. "It wouldn't have counted for much with you?"

Marian looked at her with unwavering eyes. "No," she replied, "if I'd had any particular tenderness for Geoffrey it certainly wouldn't have had the least effect beyond making me more sorry for him, but, as it happens, he never did anything to encourage vain ideas of the kind in me." She changed the subject with the abruptness which usually characterized her. "I suppose you haven't seen old Anthony Thurston since you married Leslie? He, at least, is openly bitter against you."

"I haven't. In a way, I suppose he is right. Of course, he would take the stereotyped view that it was all my fault—that is to say, that I had discarded Geoffrey?"

"I believe he did, but it struck me once or twice that Geoffrey proclaimed that view a little too loudly. Of course, with his rather primitive notions of delicacy and what is due to us, it's very much what one would have anticipated in his case. He naturally wouldn't want to leave room for any suspicion that he—wasn't altogether satisfied with you."

Millicent's face clouded. "That is a point which concerns nobody except Geoffrey and myself," she declared.

"And Anthony Thurston," Marian broke in. "Of course, it's an open secret that if you had married Geoffrey you would both have benefited by his will. As things have turned out, my own opinion is that the question whether either of you ever gets a penny of the property depends a great deal on the view he continues to take of the matter. Any way, that's not the least concern of mine, except that I'm sorry for Geoffrey. I wonder if I'm going too far in asking what it was you and he actually split upon. I'm referring to the immediate cause of the trouble."

"I can tell you that," Millicent answered quickly, for she was glad to remove the ground for one suspicion, which was evidently in Marian's mind. "Geoffrey insisted on giving up the mine when he could have sold it, and going out to Australia or Canada. I wouldn't go with him. I think nobody could have reasonably expected me to."

Marian smiled. "Well," she said, "I wonder if you know that your husband was one of the men who were willing to take the mine over. There are reasons for believing it was what brought him here in the first place."

Millicent's start betrayed the fact that this was news to her, but just then there was a rattle of wheels outside, and Marian rose. A murmur of voices and laughter grew clearer when the outer door was opened, and the two could hear the returning shooters talking with their host, who had gone out another way to meet them.

"The birds were scarce and very wild," announced one of them. "We had only two or three brace all morning, though we were a little more fortunate when we got up onto the higher land. It's my candid opinion that we should have done better there, but Leslie had all the luck in the turnips, and he made a shocking bad use of it."

"That's a fact," assented Leslie with what struck Millicent as a rather strained laugh. "I was right off the mark. There are some days when you simply can't shoot."

Several of the women guests now entered the hall, but the men did not come in. Judging from the sounds outside they seemed to be waiting while coats or cartridge bags were handed down to them from the dog-cart, and they were evidently bantering one another in the meanwhile.

"It depends upon how long you sit up in the smoking-room on the previous night," said one of them, and another observed:

"If you happen to be in business, the state of the markets has its effect."

Millicent started again at this, for she remembered her husband's expression when he had read his letter on the preceding evening. A third speaker took up the conversation.

"I don't think any variation in the price of Colonials or Kaffirs, or of wheat and cotton, for that matter, should prevent a man from telling the difference between a hare and a dog. I've a suspicion that if Tom cares to look he'll find one or two number six pellets in the hindquarters of the setter. It's a good thing our friend wasn't quite up to his usual form that time."

A burst of laughter followed, and Leslie's voice broke through it rather sharply as he replied: "He should have kept the brute in hand. The difference isn't a big one when you can only see a liver-colored patch through a clump of bracken. Besides, there was a hare."

"Undoubtedly," cried somebody. "Lawson got it."

Then they came in one after another, and while some of them spoke to their hostess and the other women Leslie walked up to the little table where several letters were spread out. Millicent watched him as he did it, and there was no doubt that the very way he moved was suggestive of restrained eagerness. She saw him tear open a telegram and crumple it in his hand, after which he seized a second one and ripped it across the fold in his clumsy haste. Then as he put the pieces together his face grew suddenly pale and haggard. Nobody else, however, appeared to notice him, and he leaned with one hand upon the table for a moment or two with his head turned away from her. She felt her heart beat painfully fast, for it was clear that a disaster of some kind had befallen him, though a large part of her anxiety sprang from the question how far the fact was likely to affect herself. He moved away from the table, and went towards the stairway at the further end of the hall, and she followed him

a few minutes later. He was sitting by an open window when she reached their room. A candle flickered beside him and a little bundle of papers was clenched in one hand.

"What is it, Harry?" she asked.

He looked up at her, and his voice sounded hoarse. "I'll try to tell you later," he answered. "There's a dinner to be got through, and it will be a big enough effort to sit it out. Slip away as soon as you can afterward without attracting attention. You'll find me on the terrace."

He dismissed her with a wave of his hand, and she turned towards the little dressing-room. When she came out again he had gone, leaving his outdoor clothing scattered on the floor.

The dinner that followed was an ordeal to Millicent, but she took her part in the conversation, and glanced towards her husband only now and then. He did not eat a great deal, and though he spoke when it seemed necessary, she noticed the trace of unsteadiness in his voice. At last, however, the meal, which seemed to drag on interminably, was finished and as soon as possible she slipped out upon the terrace where she found Leslie leaning against a seat. The moon which had risen higher was brighter now, and she could see his face. It showed set and somber in the pale silvery light.

"Well?" she said impatiently. "Can't you speak?"

"I'll try," he answered. "Winkleheim Reef Explorations went down to four and six pence to-day, and as there's 5 shillings a share not paid up, it's very probable that one wouldn't be able to give the stock away before the market closes to-morrow."

"Ah," replied Millicent sharply, "didn't you tell me that they were worth sixteen shillings not very long ago? Why didn't you sell them then?"

"Because, as it seems to me now, my greediness was greater than my judgment. I wanted twenty shillings,

and I thought I saw how I could get it." He paused with a little jarring laugh. "As a matter of fact—strange as it may seem—I believed in the thing. That is why I let them send out their independent expert, and held on when the stock began to drop. At the worst, I'd good reasons for believing Walmer would let me see the cipher report in time to sell. As it happened, he and the other traitor sold their own stock instead and that must have started the panic. Now they've got their report. There's no ore that will pay for milling in the reef."

It was not all clear to Millicent, but she understood from his manner that her husband was ruined. "Then what are we to do?" she asked. "Is there nobody who will give you a start again? You must be known in the business."

"That is the precise trouble. I'm too well known. So long as a man is a winner at this particular game and can make it worth while for interested folks to applaud him, or, at least, to keep their mouths shut, he can find a field for his talents when he wants it, but once he makes a false move or comes down with a bang, they get their claws in him and keep him from getting up again. Nobody has any sympathy with a broken company exploiter, especially when he has for once been crazy enough to believe in his own venture."

Leslie found it a small relief to run on with ironical bitterness, but Millicent, who was severely practical in some respects, checked him.

"You haven't answered my other question."

"Then I won't keep you waiting. In a few weeks we'll go out to the Pacific Slope of North America. I may save enough from the wreck to start me in the land-agency business somewhere in British Columbia."

Millicent turned from him, and gazed down the moonlit valley. Troubled as she was, its rugged beauty and its stillness appealed to her, and she knew it would be a wrench to leave the land which had hitherto safely shel-

tered her. She had known only the smoother side of life in it, and nobody could appreciate the ease and luxury it could offer some of its inhabitants better than she did. Now, it seemed, she must leave it, and go out to struggle for a mere living in some unlovely town in what she supposed must be a wild and semi-barbarous country. She felt bitter against the man who, as she thought of it, had dragged her down, but she hid her resentment.

"But you know nothing about the land-agency business," she pointed out.

Leslie laughed ironically. "I have a few ideas. Milligan—we had him over at dinner once—made a good deal of money that way, and from what he told me it doesn't seem very different from the business I have been engaged in. Success evidently depends upon one's ability to sell the confiding investor what he thinks he'd like to get. Somehow I fancy that, with moderately good luck, two or three years of it should set us on our feet."

"But those two or three years. It's unthinkable!" Millicent broke out.

"I'm afraid you will have to face them," said Leslie dryly. He turned and looked hard at her. "You can't reasonably rue your bargain. You knew when I married you that while I had the command of money my business was a risky one."

Again Millicent stood silent a moment or two. She recognized that it was largely because Leslie enjoyed that command of money that she had discarded Geoffrey. Now his riches had apparently taken wings and vanished, but the man was bound to her still. One could fancy that there was something like retribution in the thing.

"It's rather dreadful, but I suppose I shall not make it any better by complaining," she remarked after a long silence.

Her husband's manner became embarrassed. "I understand that Anthony Thurston is well off and you were

a favorite of his," he said. "Would it be of any use if you explained the trouble to him?"

"No," was the answer, "it would be perfectly useless, and for other reasons that course is impossible. He meant me to marry Geoffrey and I've mortally offended him. He's a hard, determined man."

Leslie made a sign of assent, though there was a suggestion of grim amusement in his manner. "I suppose you couldn't very well explain that it was Geoffrey who threw you over? That would, no doubt, be too much to expect of you, and, after all, when you get to the bottom of the matter it wouldn't be true. In reality you finished with Geoffrey when he decided to emigrate instead of selling the mine, didn't you?"

Millicent flashed a swift glance at him, but he met it half-mockingly, and she turned her head away. "Why should you make yourself intolerable?" she returned. "I'm sorry for you—that is, I want to be, if you will let me."

Leslie shrugged his shoulders as he lit a cigar. "Well," he said, "it can't be helped. We must face the thing! And now I don't want to set the others wondering why we have slipped away; we had better go in again." They walked back into the house.

Leslie, with one or two of the other men, sat up late in the smoking-room. Leslie told a number of stories with force and point, and when at length two of his companions went up the stairway together, one of them looked at the other with a lifting of the eyebrows.

"After what Leslie has got through to-night, I'll take the farthest place in the line from him to-morrow," he said. "If his nerves aren't unusually good it seems quite possible that there'll be more than a setter peppered."

CHAPTER VII

THE BREAKING OF THE JAM

It was late one moonlight night when Geoffrey Thurston sat inside his double-skinned tent which was pitched above a river of British Columbia. A few good furs checkered the spruce twigs which served as a carpet, and the canvas dwelling was both commodious and comfortable. A bright brass lamp hung from the ridge pole, a nickeled clock ticked cheerily upon a hanging shelf behind the neat camp cot, while the rest of the well-made furniture betokened a degree of prosperity. One of Savine's junior assistants, sent up there in an emergency to replace an older man, sat close by, and, because he dwelt in a bark shanty, envied Thurston his tent.

Geoffrey was studying a bridge-work tracing that lay unrolled upon his knees.

"I can only repeat what I said months ago. The wing slide of the log pass is too short and the angle over sharp," he said, glancing at the jam. "An extra big log will jam there some day and imperil the whole bridge. Did you send a man down to keep watch to-night?"

"The slide is in accordance with the Roads and Trails specification," answered the young man, airily. "There was no reason why we should do more work than they asked for. You're an uneasy man, Thurston, always looking for trouble, and I've had enough of late over the rascally hoboes who, when they feel inclined, condescend to work for me. Oh, yes! I posted the lookout as soon as I heard Davies was running his saw logs down."

Thurston hitched his chair forward and threw the door-flap back so that he could look out into the night. The tent stood perched on the hillside. Long ranks of climb-

ing pines stretched upwards from it to the scarped rocks which held up the snow-fields on the shoulders of the mighty peaks above. Thin white mist and the roar of water rose up from the shadowy gorge below, but in one place, where the rock walls which hemmed it in sloped down, a gossamer-like structure spanned the chasm. This was a wagon-road bridge Julius Savine, the contractor of large interests and well-known name, was building for the Provincial authorities, and on their surveyor's recommendation he had sub-let to Thurston the construction of a pass through which saw-logs and driftwood might slide without jamming between the piers. Savine, being pressed for time, had brought in a motley collection of workmen, picked up haphazard in the seaboard cities. After bargaining to work for certain wages, these workmen had demanded twenty per cent. more. Thurston, who had picked his own assistants carefully, among the sturdy ranchers, and had aided Savine's representative in resisting this demand, now surmised that the malcontents were meditating mischief. There were some mighty mean rascals among them, his foreman said.

"You're looking worried again," observed his companion, presently, and Thurston answered, "Perhaps I am. I wish Davies would run his logs down by daylight, but presumably the stream is too fast for him when the waters rise. It might give some of your friends yonder an opportunity, Summers."

"You don't figure they're capable of wrecking the bridge?" replied Summers, showing sudden uneasiness.

"One or two among them, including the man I had to thrash, are capable of anything. Perhaps you had better hail your watchman," Thurston said.

Summers blew a whistle, and an answer came back faintly through the fret of the river: "Plenty saw logs coming down. All of them handy sizes and sliding safely through."

"That's good enough," declared Summers. "I'm not

made of cast-iron, and need a little sleep at times, so good-night to you!"

He departed with the cheerful confidence of the salaried man, and Thurston, who fought for his own interests, flung himself down on his trestle cot with all his clothes on. Neither the timber slide nor the bridge was quite finished, but because rivers in that region shrink at night when the frost checks the drainage from the feeding glaciers on the peaks above, the saw-miller had insisted on driving down his logs when there was less chance of their stranding on the shoals that cumbered the high-water channel. Thurston lay awake for some time, listening to the fret of the river, which vibrated far across the silence of the hills, and to the occasional crash of a mighty log smiting the slide. Hardly had his eyelids closed when he was aroused by a sound of hurried footsteps approaching the tent. He stood wide awake in the entrance before the newcomer reached it.

"There's a mighty big pine caught its butt on one slide and jammed its thin end across the pier," said the man. "Logs piling up behind it already!"

As he spoke somebody beat upon a suspended iron sheet down in the valley and drowsy voices rose up from among the clustered tents. Summers went by shouting, "Get a move on, before we lose the bridge!"

Five minutes later Thurston, running across a bending plank, halted on the rock which served as foundation for the main bridge pier. Beside him Summers shouted confused orders to a group of struggling men. The moonlight beat down mistily through the haze that rose from the river, and Geoffrey could see the long wedge-headed timber framing that he had built, beside the wing on the shore-side, so that any trunk floating down would cannon off at an angle and shoot safely between the piers. But one huge fir had proved too long for the pass, and when its butt canted, the other end had driven athwart the point of the wedge, after which, because the

river was black with drifting logs, other heavy trunks drove against it and jammed it fast. Panting men were hard at work with levers and pike-poles striving to wrench the massive trunk clear, and one lighted an air-blast flare, whose red glare flickered athwart the strip of water foaming between the piers. It showed that some of the logs forced up by the pressure were sliding out above the others, while, amid a horrible grinding, some sank. One side of the river was blocked by a mass of timber that was increasing every moment. Thurston feared that the unfinished piers could not long withstand the pressure, and he remembered that his own work would be paid for only on completion. Nevertheless, he passed several minutes in a critical survey, and then glanced towards certain groups of dark figures watching for the approaching ruin.

"She'll go down inside an hour—that is certain, and Savine will lose thousands of dollars," said Summers, whose eyes were wide with apprehension. "I'm rattled completely. Can't you think of anything that might be done?"

"Yes!" answered Thurston, coolly. "It is, however, almost too late now. It could have been done readily, if the man who should have seen to it had not turned traitor. Hello! Where's Mattawa Tom?"

A big sinewy ax-man from the forests of Northern Ontario sprang up beside him, and Thurston said:

"I'm going to try to chop through the king log that's keying them. It's rather more than you bargained for, but will you stand by me, Tom?"

"Looks mighty like suicide!" was the dry answer. "But if you're ready to chance it, I'm coming right along."

The workmen had divided into two hostile camps, but there was a growl of admiring wonder from friends and foes alike when two figures, balancing bright axes, stood high up on the pier slides ready to leap down upon the

working logs. Then disjointed cries went up: "Too late!" "You'll be smashed flatter than a flapjack when the jam breaks up!" "Get hold of the fools, somebody!" "Take their axes away!"

"I'll brain the first man who touches mine," threatened Thurston, turning savagely upon those who approached him with remonstrances, and there was a simultaneous murmur from all the assembly when the two adventurous men dropped upon the timber. The logs rolled, groaned, and heaved beneath them and Thurston, trusting to the creeper spikes upon his heels, sprang from one great tree trunk to another behind his companion, who had a longer experience of the perilous work of log-driving. Here a gap, filled with spouting foam, opened up before him; there a trunk upon which he was about to step rolled over and sank. But he worked his way forward towards the center of the fir which keyed the growing mass. This log was many feet in girth. Pressed down level with the water, it was already bending like a slackly-strung bow.

The example proved inspiring. Thurston's assistants were sturdy, fearless men, who often risked their lives in wresting a living from the forest, so several among them prepared to follow. Two seamen deserters sprang out from the ranks of the mutineers. One stalwart forest rancher, however, tripped his comrade up, and sat upon his prostrate form shouting, "You'll stop just where you are, you blame idiot! You couldn't do nothing if you got there. Hardly room for them two fellows already where they can get at the log!"

The remaining volunteers saw the force of this argument and when somebody increased the blast of the lamp so that the roaring column of flame leapt up higher, the men stood very still, staring at the two who had now gained the center of the partly submerged log.

It requires considerable practice to acquire full mastery of the long-hafted ax, but Thurston, who was stout of arm and keen of eye, had managed to earn his bread with

it one winter in an Ontario logging camp. When he swung aloft the heavy wedge of steel, it reflected the blast lamp's radiance, making red flashes as it circled round his head. It came down hissing close past his knee. Mattawa Tom's blade crossed it when it rose, and the first white chip leapt up. More chips followed in quick succession until they whirled in one continuous shower, and the razor-edged steel losing definite form became a confused circling brightness, in the center of which two supple figures swayed and heaved. The red light smiting the faces of the two showed great drops of sweat, the swell of toil-hardened muscles on the corded arms, and the rise of each straining chest. There was not a clash nor a falter, but, flash after flash, the blades came down chunking into the ever-widening notch. Summers had seen sword play in Montreal armories, and had heard the ax clang often on the side of Western firs, but—for Thurston was fighting to stave off ruin—this grim struggle in the face of a desperate risk surpassed any remembered exhibition of fencers' skill with the steel. The trunk was bending visibly beneath the hewers, the river frothed more at their feet, and the giant logs were rolling, creeping, shocking close behind, ready to plunge forward when the partly severed trunk should yield.

Thurston felt as if his lungs were bursting, his heart throbbed painfully, and something drummed deafeningly inside his head. His vision grew hazy, and he could scarcely see the widening gap in the rough bark into which the trenchant steel cut. It was evident that the steadily increasing jam would rub the bridge piers out of existence long before any two men could hew half way through the great trunk, but, fortunately, the log was now bending like a fully-drawn bow, and the pressure would burst it asunder when a little more of its circumference had been chopped into. So, choking and blinded with perspiration, Geoffrey smote on mechanically, until the man from Mattawa said, "She's about busted."

Just then there was a clamor from the watchers on the piers. Men shouted, "Come back." "Whole jam's starting!" "King log's yielding now!" "Jump for your lives before the wreckage breaks away with you!"

Mattawa Tom leapt shorewards from moving log to log, but for a few moments Thurston, who scarcely noticed his absence, chopped on alone. Filled with the lust of conflict, he remembered only that it was necessary to make sure of victory before he relaxed an effort. Thrice more in succession he whirled the heavy ax above his head, while, with a sharp snapping of fibers, the fir trunk yielded beneath his feet. Flinging his ax into the river he stood erect, breathless, a moment too late. The logs behind the one which perilously supported him were creeping forward ready for the mad rush that must follow a few seconds later.

There remained now but one poor chance of escape and he seized it instinctively. Springing along the sinking trunk, he threw himself clear of it into the river, while running men jostled each other as they surged toward the side of the timber when he sank. A wet head broke the surface, a swinging left hand followed it. The swimmer clutched the edge of a loosely-fitted beam, and held it until strong hands reached down to him. Some gripped his wet fingers, some the back of his coat, one even clutched his hair. There was a heave, then a scramble, and, amid hoarse cheers, the rescued man fell over backwards among his rescuers.

Thurston, who stood up dripping, said, somewhat shakily: "Ah, you were only just in time! I'm vastly grateful to you all."

The last words were lost in a deafening crash as the jam broke up, and the giant logs drove through the opening, thrashing the river into foam. The tree-trunks ground against one another, or smote the slide casing with a thunderous shock; but the stone-backed timber stood the strain, and when the clamor of the passage of the logs

ceased, a heavy stillness brooded over the camp as the river grew empty again.

Thurston sought out the man from Mattawa. Laying a wet hand upon his shoulder he said: "Thank you, Tom. I won't forget the assistance you rendered me."

"That's all right," answered the brawny ax-man, awkwardly. "I get my wages safe and regular, and I've tackled as tough a contract for a worse master before."

There was no chance for further speech. Davies, who owned the saw-mill lower down stream, reined in a lathered horse, close by. "Where have all my logs gone to?" he asked. "My foreman roused me to say only a few dozen had brought up in the boom, and as the boys were running them down by scores I figured they'd piled up against your bridge. I don't see any special chaos about here, though you look as if you had been in swimming; but what in the name of thunder have you done with the logs?"

"They're on their way down river," Thurston replied, dryly. "We had some trouble with them which necessitated my taking a bath. But see here, what made you turn a two-hundred-foot red fir loose among them?"

"I didn't," answered Davies, with a puzzled air. "The boys saw every log into standard lengths. We have no use for a two-hundred-footer and couldn't get her into the mill. Are you sure it wasn't a wind-blown log?"

"I saw the butt had been freshly cross-cut," declared Thurston with an ominous glitter in his eyes. "I understand you are pretty slack just now. As a favor, would you hire your chopping gang to me for a few days? I'll tell you why I want them later."

"I'll decide in a few minutes," he added, when Davies had told him what the cost would be. Turning towards Summers he said: "There may be several more big red firs growing handy beside the river, and I mean to prevent any more accidents of this kind in future. If your employer will not reimburse me, I will bear the cost myself.

I would sooner spend my last dollar than allow any of these loafers to coerce me."

The workmen stood still, all of them curious, and a few uneasy. Raising one hand to demand attention, Thurston said: "A red fir was felled by two or three among you to-day, and launched down stream after darkness fell. I want the men who did it to step forward and explain their reasons to me."

"You're a mighty bold man," remarked Summers—who knew that, although few were actually dangerous, the malcontents outnumbered Thurston's loyal assistants.

Among the listeners nobody moved, but there was a murmuring, and all eyes were fixed upon the speaker, who, either by design or accident, leaned upon the haft of a big ax.

"I hardly expected an answer," he went on. "Accordingly, I'll proceed to name the men who I believe must know about this contemptible action, and notify them that they will be paid off to-morrow."

A tumult of mingled wrath and applause started when Thurston coolly called aloud a dozen names. One voice broke through the others: "We're working for Julius Savine, an' don't count a bad two-bits on you," it declared defiantly. "We'll all fling our tools into the river before we let one of them fellows go."

"In that case the value of the tools will be deducted from the wages due you," Thurston announced calmly. "After this notice, Julius Savine's representative won't pay any of the men I mention, whether they work or not; and nobody, who does not earn it, will get a single meal out of the cook shanty. I'll give you until to-morrow to make up your minds concerning what you will do. Aside to Davies he said: "I'll take your lumber gang in any case. Go back and send them in as soon as you can."

The assembly broke up in a divided state of mind. Although it was very late, little groups lingered outside

the tents, and at intervals angry voices were heard. Summers set out for the railroad to communicate by telegraph with his employer, and Thurston retired to his tent, where he went peacefully to sleep. Awakening later than usual, he listened with apparent unconcern to Mattawa Tom, who aroused him, with the warning:

"It's time you were out. Them fellows are coming along for their money. The boys called up a big roll, as soon as the lumber gang marched in, and, though there was considerable wild talking, the sensible ones allowed it was no more use kicking."

"That's all right," averred Thurston, who paid the departing malcontents and was glad to get rid of them, knowing that the lumbermen, who were mostly poor settlers, had small sympathy with the mutineers and that he would have at least a balance of power. He set the men to work immediately lengthening the wing of the log slide and the wedge guards of the piers. He himself toiled as hard as any two among them, and, to the astonishment of all, completed the big task before the week was past.

"I hardly like to say what it has cost me, but no log of any length could jam itself in the new pass," he said to Summers.

"You're an enterprising man," was the answer. "Savine is a bit of a rustler, too, and you'll have a chance of explaining things to him to-morrow. I have had word from him that he's coming through."

CHAPTER VIII

A REST BY THE WAY

It was afternoon when Julius Savine, accompanied by Summers, had entered Thurston's tent. On the way from the railroad, Summers had explained to the contractor all that had happened. Geoffrey rose to greet Savine, glancing at his employer with some curiosity, for he had not met him before. Savine was a man of quick, restless movements and nervous disposition. The gray that tinged his long mustache, lightly sprinkled his hair, gave evidence of his fifty years of intense living. He was known to be not only a daring engineer, but a generally successful speculator in mining and industrial enterprises. Nevertheless, Geoffrey fancied that something in his face gave a hint of physical weakness.

"I have heard one or two creditable things about you, and thought of asking you to run up to my offices, but I'm glad to meet you now," said Savine with a smile, adding when Thurston made a solemn bow, "There, I've been sufficiently civil, and I see you would rather I talked business. I'm considerably indebted to you for the way you tackled the late crisis, and approve of the log-guard's extension. How much did the extra work cost you?"

"Here is the wages bill and a list of the iron work charged at cost," Thurston answered. "As I did the work without any orders you would be justified in declining to pay for it, and I have included no profit."

"Ah!" said Savine, who glanced over the paper and scribbled across it. Looking up with a twinkle in his eye, he asked: "Have you been acquiring riches latterly? My cashier will pay that note whenever you hand it in at Vancouver. I'll also endorse your contract for payment

if you will give it me. Further, I want to say that I've been to look at your work, and it pleases me. There are plenty of men in this province who would have done it as solidly, but it's the general design and ingenious fixings that take my fancy. May I ask where you got the ideas?"

"In England," answered Geoffrey. "I spent some time in the drawing office of a man of some note." He mentioned a name, and Savine, who looked at him critically, nodded as if in recognition. The older man smiled when Thurston showed signs of resenting his inspection.

"In that case I should say you ought to do," Savine observed, cheerfully.

"I don't understand," said Thurston, and Savine answered:

"No? Well, if you'll wait a few moments I'll try to make things plain to you. I want a live man with brains of his own, and some knowledge of mechanical science. There is no trouble about getting them by the car load from the East or the Old Country, but the man for me must know how to use his muscles, if necessary, and handle ax and drill as well. In short, I want one who has been right through the mill as you seem to have been, and, so long as he earns it, I'm not going to worry over his salary."

"I'm afraid I would not suit you," said Geoffrey. "I'm rather too fond of my own way to make a good servant, and of late I have not done badly fighting for my own hand. Therefore, while I thank you, and should be glad to undertake any minor contracts you can give me, I prefer to continue as at present."

"I should not fancy that you would be particularly easy to get on with," Savine observed with another shrewd glance, but with unabated good humor. "Still, what you suggest might suit me. I have rather more work at present than I can hold on to with both hands, and have tolerably good accounts of you. Come West with me and

spend the week end at my house, where we could talk things over quietly."

Geoffrey was gratified—for the speaker was famous in his profession—and he showed his feeling as he answered: "I consider myself fortunate that you should ask me."

"I figured you were not fond of compliments, and I'm a plain man myself," declared Savine, with the humor apparent in his keen eyes again. "I will, however, give you one piece of advice before I forget it. My sister-in-law might be there, and if she wants to doctor you, don't let her. She has a weakness for physicking strangers, and the results are occasionally embarrassing."

It happened accordingly that Thurston, who had overhauled his wardrobe in Vancouver, duly arrived at a pretty wooden villa which looked down upon a deep inlet. He knew the mountain valleys of the Cumberland, and had wandered, sometimes footsore and hungry, under the giant ramparts of the Selkirks and the Rockies, but he had never seen a fairer spot than the reft in the hills which sheltered Savine's villa, and was known by its Indian name, "The Place of the Hundred Springs."

For a background somber cedars lifted their fretted spires against the skyline on the southern hand. Beneath the trees the hillsides closed in and the emerald green of maples and tawny tufts of oak rolled down to a breadth of milk-white pebbles and a stretch of silver sand, past which clear green water shoaling from shade to shade wound inland. Threads of glancing spray quivered in and out among the foliage, and high above, beyond a strip of sparkling sea and set apart by filmy cloud from all the earth below, stretched the giant saw-edge of the Coast Range's snow.

The white-painted, red-roofed dwelling, with its green-latticed shutters, tasteful scroll work and ample, if indifferently swarded, lawns, was pleasant to look upon, but Thurston found more pleasure in the sight of its

young mistress, who awaited him in a great cool room that was hung with deer-head trophies and floored with parquetry of native timber.

Helen Savine wore a white dress and her favorite crimson roses nestled in the belt. Though she greeted Geoffrey with indifferent cordiality, the girl was surprised when her eyes rested upon him. Thurston was not a man of the conventional type one meets and straightway forgets, and she had often thought about him; but, since the night at Crosbie Ghyll, his image had presented itself as she first saw him—ragged, hungry, and grim, a worthy descendant of the wild Thurstons about whom Musker had discoursed. Now, in spite of his weather-beaten face and hardened hands, he appeared what he was, a man of education and some refinement, and his resolute expression, erect carriage, and muscular frame, rendered lithe and almost statuesque by much swinging of the ax, gave him an indefinite air of distinction. Again she decided that Geoffrey Thurston was a well-favored man, but remembering Musker's stories, she set herself to watch for some trace of inherent barbarity. This was unfortunate for Geoffrey, because in such cases observers generally discover what they search for.

Geoffrey was placed beside Helen at dinner, and having roughed it since he left England, and even before that time, it seemed strange to him to be deftly waited upon at a table glittering with silver and gay with flowers. Mrs. Thomas Savine sat opposite him, between her husband and the host, and Helen found certain suspicions confirmed when Savine referred to the crushing of the strike. Previously, he had given his daughter a brief account of it.

"It was daringly done," said Helen, "but I wonder, Mr. Thurston, if you and others who hold the power ever consider the opposite side of the question. It may be that those men, whose task is evidently highly dangerous, have wives and children depending upon them, and a few extra

dollars, earned hardly enough, no doubt, might mean so much to them."

"I am afraid I don't always do so," answered Geoffrey. "I have toiled tolerably hard as a workman myself. If any employé should consider that he was underpaid for the risk he ran, and should say so civilly, I should listen to him. On the other hand, if any combination strove by unfair means to coerce me, I should spare no effort to crush it!"

Thurston generally was too much in earnest to make a pleasant dinner-table conversationalist. As he spoke, he shut one big brown hand. It was a trifling action, and he was, perhaps, unconscious of it, but Helen, who noticed the flicker in his eyes and the vindictive tightening of the hard fingers, shrank from him instinctively.

"Is that not a cruel plan of action, and is there no room for a gentler policy in your profession? Must the weak always be trampled out of existence?" she replied, with a slight trace of indignation.

Thurston turned towards her with a puzzled expression. Julius Savine smiled, but his sister-in-law, who had remained silent, but not unobservant, broke in: "You believe in the hereditary transmission of character, Mr. Thurston?"

"I think most people do to some extent," answered Geoffrey. "But why do you ask me?"

"It's quite simple," said Mrs. Savine, smiling. "Did my husband tell you that when we were in England, we were held up by a storm there one night in your ancestral home? There was a man there who ought to belong to the feudal ages. He was called Musker, and he told us quaint stories about some of you. I fancy Geoffrey, who robbed the king's dragoons, must have looked just like you when you shut your fingers so, a few minutes ago."

"I am a little surprised," Geoffrey returned with a flush rising in his cheeks. "Musker used to talk a great deal of romantic nonsense. Crosbie Ghyll is no longer

mine. I hope you passed a pleasant night there." Mrs. Savine became eloquent concerning the historic interest of the ancient house and her brother-in-law, who appeared interested, observed.

"So far, you have not told me about that particular adventure."

Again the incident was unfortunate for Geoffrey, because Helen, who had no great respect for her aunt's perceptions, decided that if the similitude had struck even that lady, she was right in her own estimation of Thurston's character.

"We heard of several instances of reckless daring, and we Colonials consider all the historic romance of the land we sprang from belongs to us as well as you," Mrs. Savine said. "So, if it is not an intrusion, may I ask if any of those border warriors were remarkable for deeds of self-abnegation or charity?"

"I am afraid not," admitted Geoffrey, rather grimly. "Neither did any of them ever do much towards the making of history. All of them were generally too busy protecting their property or seizing that of their neighbors! But, at least, when they fought, they seem to have fought for the losing side, and, according to tradition, paid for it dearly. However, to change the subject, is it fair to hold any man responsible for his ancestors' shortcomings? They have gone back to the dust long ago, and it is the present that concerns us."

"Still, can anybody avoid the results of those shortcomings or virtues?" persisted Helen, and her father said:

"I hardly think so. There is an instance beside you, Mr. Thurston. Miss Savine's grandfather ruled in paternally feudal fashion over a few dozen superstitious habitants way back in old-world Quebec, as his folks had done since the first French colonization. That explains my daughter's views on social matters and her weakness for playing the somewhat autocratic Lady Bountiful.

The Seigneurs were benevolent village despots with very quaint ways."

Savine spoke lightly, and one person only noticed that the face of his daughter was slightly less pale in coloring than before, but that one afterwards remembered her father's words and took them as a clue to the woman's character. He discovered also that Helen Savine was both generous and benevolent, but that she loved to rule, and to rule somewhat autocratically.

The first day at the Savine villa passed like a pleasant dream to the man who had toiled for a bare living in the shadowy forests or knelt all day among hot rocks to hold the weary drill with bleeding fingers. Mr. Savine grew more and more interested in Geoffrey, who, during the second day, made great advances in the estimation of Mrs. Thomas Savine. Bicycles were not so common a woman's possession in Canada, or elsewhere, then. In fact, there were few roads in British Columbia fit to propel one on. An American friend had sent Miss Savine a wheel which, after a few journeys over a corduroy road, groaned most distressfully whenever she mounted it. Helen desired to ride in to the railroad, but the gaudy machine complained even more than usual, and when at last one of its wheels declined to revolve, Julius Savine called Geoffrey's attention to it.

"If you are anxious for mild excitement, and want to earn my daughter's gratitude, you might tackle that confounded thing, Mr. Thurston," he said. "The local blacksmith shakes his head over it, and sent it back the last time worse than ever, with several necessary portions missing. After running many kinds of machines in my time, I'm willing to own that this particular specimen defies me."

Thurston had stripped and fitted various intricate mining appliances, but he had never struggled with a bicycle. So, when Helen accepted his offer of assistance, he wheeled the machine out upon the lawn and proceeded light-

heartedly to dismantle it, while the Savine brothers lounged in cane chairs, encouraging him over their cigars. The dismantling was comparatively simple, but when the time for reassembling came, Thurston, who found that certain cups could not by any legitimate means be induced to screw home into their places, was perforce obliged to rest the machine upon two chairs and wriggle underneath it, where he reclined upon his back with grimy oil dripping upon his forehead. Red in the face, he crawled out to breathe at intervals, and Helen made stern efforts to conceal her mingled alarm and merriment, when Thomas Savine said:

"Will you take long odds, Thurston, that you never make that invention of his Satanic Majesty run straight again?"

Mrs. Savine cautioned the operator about sunstroke and apoplexy. When Thomas Savine caught Helen's eye, both laughed outright, and Geoffrey, mistaking the reason, felt hurt; he determined to conquer the bicycle or remain beneath it all night. When at last he succeeded in putting the various parts together and straightened his aching back, he hoped that he did not look so disgusted, grimy and savage as he undoubtedly felt.

"You must really let it alone," said Helen. "The sun is very hot, and perhaps, you might be more successful after luncheon. I have noticed that when mending bicycles a rest and refreshment sometimes prove beneficial."

"That's so!" agreed Thomas Savine. "Young Harry was wont to tackle it on just those lines. He used up several of my best Cubanos and a bottle of claret each time, before he had finished; and then I was never convinced that the thing went any better."

"You must beware of ruining your health," interposed Mrs. Savine. "Mending bicycles frequently leads to an accumulation of malevolent humors. Did I interrupt you, Mr. Thurston?"

"I was only going to say that it is nearly finished, and that I should not like to be vanquished by an affair of this kind," said Geoffrey with empahsis. "Would it hurt the machine if I stood it upon its head, Miss Savine?"

"Oh, no, and I am so grateful," Helen answered assuringly, noticing guiltily that there were oil and red dust, besides many somber smears, upon the operator's face and jacket, while the skin was missing from several of his knuckles.

It was done at last, and Geoffrey sighed, while the rest of the party expressed surprise as well as admiration when the wheels revolved freely without click or groan. Julius Savine nodded, with more than casual approval, and Helen was gracious with her thanks.

"You look quite faint," observed Mrs. Savine. "It was the hot sun on your forehead, and the mental excitement. Such things are often followed by dangerous consequences, and you must take a dose of my elixir. Helen, dear, you know where to find the bottle."

Julius Savine was guilty of a slight gesture of impatience. His brother laughed, while Helen seemed anxious to slip away. Geoffrey answered:

"I hardly think one should get very mentally excited over a bicycle. I feel perfectly well, and only somewhat greasy."

"That is just one of the symptoms. Yes, you have hit it—greasy feeling!" broke in the amateur dispenser, who rarely relaxed her efforts until she had run down her victim. "Helen, why don't you hunt round for that bottle?"

"I mean greasy externally," explained Geoffrey in desperation, and again Thomas Savine chuckled, while Helen, who ground one little boot-heel into the grasses, deliberately turned away. Mrs. Savine, however, cheerfully departed to find the bottle, and soon returned with it and a wine glass. She filled the glass with an inky fluid which smelt unpleasant, and said to Geoffrey:

"You will be distinctly better the moment you have taken this!"

Geoffrey took the goblet, walked apart a few paces, and, making a wry face, heroically swallowed the bitter draught, after which Mrs. Savine, who beamed upon him, said:

"You feel quite differently, don't you?"

"Yes!" asserted Geoffrey, truthfully, longing to add that he had felt perfectly well before and had now to make violent efforts to overcome his nausea.

His heroism had its reward, however, for when Helen returned from her wheel ride, she said: "I was really ashamed when my aunt insisted on doctoring you, but you must take it as a compliment, because she only prescribes for the people she takes a fancy to. I hope the dose was not particularly nasty?"

"Sorry for you, Thurston, from experience!" cried Thomas Savine. "When I see that bottle, I just vacate the locality. The taste isn't the worst of it by a long way."

That night Julius Savine called Geoffrey into his study, and, spreading a roll of plans before him, offered terms, which were gladly accepted, for the construction of portions of several works. Savine said: "I won't worry much about references. Your work speaks for itself, and the Roads and Trails surveyor has been talking about you. I'll take you, as you'll have to take me, on trust. I keep my eye on rising young men, and I have been watching you. Besides, the man who could master an obstinate bicycle the first time he wrestled with one must have some sense of his own, and it isn't everybody who would have swallowed that physic."

"I could not well avoid doing so," said Geoffrey, with a rueful smile.

"I feel I owe you an apology, but it's my sister-in-law's one weakness, and you have won her favor for the rest of your natural life," Savine returned. "You have

had several distinguished fellow-sufferers, including provincial representatives and railroad directors, for to my horror she physicked a very famous one the last time he came. He did not suffer with your equanimity. In fact, he was almost uncivil, and said to me, 'If the secretary hadn't sent off your trestle contract, I should urge the board to reconsider it. Did you ask me here that your relatives might poison me, Savine?'"

Geoffrey laughed, and his host added:

"I want to talk over a good many details with you, and dare say you deserve a holiday—I know I do—so I shall retain you here for a week, at least. I take your consent for granted; it's really necessary."

CHAPTER IX

GEOFFREY STANDS FIRM

GEOFFREY THURSTON possessed a fine constitution, and, in spite of Mrs. Savine's treatment and her husband's predictions, rose refreshed and vigorous on the morning that followed his struggle with the bicycle. It was a glorious morning, and when breakfast was over he enjoyed the unusual luxury of lounging under the shadow of a cedar on the lawn, where he breathed in the cool breeze which rippled the sparkling straits. Hitherto, he had risen with the sun to begin a day of toil and anxiety and this brief glimpse of a life of ease, with the pleasures of congenial companionship, was as an oasis in the desert to him.

"A few days will be as much as is good for me," he told himself with a sigh. "In the meantime hard work and short commons are considerably more appropriate, but I shall win the right to all these things some day, if my strength holds out."

His forehead wrinkled, his eyes contracted, and he stared straight before him, seeing neither the luminous green of the maples nor the whispering cedars, but far off in the misty future a golden possibility, which, if well worth winning, must be painfully earned. His reverie was broken suddenly.

"Are your thoughts very serious this morning, Mr. Thurston?" a clear voice inquired, and the most alluring of the visions he had conjured up stood before him, losing nothing by the translation into material flesh. Helen Savine had halted under the cedar. In soft clinging draperies of white and cream, she was a charming reality.

"I'm afraid they were," Geoffrey answered, and Helen laughed musically.

"One would fancy that you took life too much in earnest," she said. "It is fortunately impossible either to work or to pile up money forever, and a holiday is good for everybody. I am going down to White Rock Cove to see if my marine garden is as beautiful as it used to be. Would you care to inspect it and carry this basket for me?"

Thurston showed his pleasure almost too openly. They chatted lightly on many subjects as they walked together, knee-deep, at times, among scarlet wine-berries, and the delicate green and ebony of maidenhair fern. The scents and essence of summer hung heavy in the air. Shafts of golden sunlight, piercing the somber canopy of the forest isles, touched, and, it seemed to Geoffrey, etherealized, his companion. The completeness of his enjoyment troubled the man, and presently he lapsed into silence. All this appeared too good, too pleasant, he feared, to last.

"Do you know that you have not answered my last question, nor spoken a word for the last ten minutes?" inquired Helen with a smile, at length. "Have these woods no charm for you, or are you regretting the cigar-box beneath the cedar?"

Geoffrey turned towards her, and there was a momentary flash in his eyes as he answered:

"You must forgive me. Keen enjoyment often blunts the edge of speech, and I was wishing that this walk through the cool, green stillness might last forever."

Afraid that he might have said too much, he ceased speaking abruptly, and then, after the fashion of one unskilled in tricks of speech, proceeded to remedy one blunder by committing another.

"It reminds me of the evenings at Graham's ranch. There can surely be no sunsets in the world to equal those that flame along the snows of British Columbia, and you will remember how, together, we watched them burn and fade."

It was an unfortunate reference, for now and then Helen had recalled that period with misgivings. Cut off from all association with persons of congenial tastes, she had not only found the man's society interesting, but she had allowed herself to sink into an indefinite state of companionship with him. In the mountain solitude, such camaraderie had seemed perfectly natural, but it was impossible under different circumstances. It was only on the last occasion that he had ever hinted at a continuance of this intimacy, but she had not forgotten the rash speech. Had the recollections been all upon her own side she might have permitted a partial renewal of the companionship, but she became forbidding at once when Geoffrey ventured to remind her of it.

"Yes," she said reflectively. "The sunsets were often impressive, but we are all of us unstable, and what pleases us at one time may well prove tiresome at another. If that experience were repeated I should very possibly grow sadly discontented at Graham's ranch."

Geoffrey was not only shrewd enough to comprehend that, if Miss Savine unbent during a summer holiday in the wilderness, it did not follow that she would always do so, but he felt that he deserved the rebuke. He had, however, learned patience in Canada, and was content to bide his time, so he answered good-humoredly that such a result might well be possible. They were silent until they halted where the hillside fell sharply to the verge of a cliff. Far down below Thurston could see the white pebbles shine through translucent water, and with professional instincts aroused, he dubiously surveyed the slope to the head of the crag.

Julius Savine, or somebody under his orders, had constructed a zig-zag pathway which wound down between small maples and clusters of wine-berries shimmering like blood-drops among their glossy leaves. In places the pathway was underpinned with timber against the side of an almost sheer descent, and he noticed that one could

have dropped a vertical line from the fish-hawk, which hung poised a few feet outside one angle, into the water. They descended cautiously to the first sharp bend, and here Geoffrey turned around in advance of his companion. "Do you mind telling me how long it is since you or anybody else has used this path, Miss Savine?" he inquired.

"I came up this way last autumn, and think hardly any other person has used it since. But why do you ask?" was the reply.

"I fancied so!" Geoffrey lapsed instinctively into his brusque, professional style of comment. "Poor system of underpinning, badly fixed yonder. I am afraid you must find some other way down to the beach this morning."

It was long since Helen had heard anybody apply the word "must" to herself. As Julius Savine's only daughter, most of her wishes had been immediately gratified, while the men she met vied with one another in paying her homage. In addition to this, her father, in whose mechanical abilities she had supreme faith, had constructed that pathway especially for her pleasure. So for several reasons her pride took fire, and she answered coldly: "The path is perfectly safe. My father himself watched the greater portion of its building."

"It was safe once, no doubt," answered Geoffrey, slightly puzzled as to how he had offended her, but still resolute. "The rains of last winter, however, have washed out much of the surface soil, leaving bare parts of the rock beneath, and the next angle yonder is positively dangerous. Can we not go around?"

"Only by the head of the valley, two miles away at least," Helen's tone remained the reverse of cordial. "I have climbed both in the Selkirks and the Coast Range, and to anyone with a clear head, even in the most slippery places, there cannot be any real danger!"

"I regret that I cannot agree with you. I devoutly

wish I could," said Geoffrey, uneasily. "No! you must please go no further, Miss Savine."

The girl's eyes glittered resentfully. A flush crept into the center of either cheek as she walked towards him. Though he did not intend it, there was perhaps too strong a suggestion of command in his attitude, and when Helen came abreast of him, he laid a hand restrainingly upon her arm. She shook it off, not with ill-humored petulance, for Helen was never ungraceful nor undignified, but with a disdain that hurt the man far more than anger. Nevertheless, knowing that he was right, he was determined that she should run no risk. Letting his hand swing at his side, he walked a few paces before her, and then turned in a narrow portion of the path where two people could not pass abreast.

"Please listen to me, Miss Savine," he began. "I am an engineer, and I can see that the bend yonder is dangerous. I cannot, therefore, consent to allow you to venture upon it. How should I face your father if anything unfortunate happened?"

"My father saw the path built," repeated Helen. "He also is an engineer, and is said to be one of the most skillful in the Dominion. I am not used to being thwarted for inadequate reasons. Let me pass."

Geoffrey stood erect and immovable. "I am very sorry, Miss Savine, that, in this one instance, I cannot obey you," he said.

There was an awkward silence, and while they looked at each other, Helen felt her breath come faster. Retreating a few paces she seated herself upon a boulder, thus leaving the task of terminating an unpleasant position to Geoffrey, who was puzzled for a time. Finally, an inspiration dawned upon Thurston, who said:

"Perhaps you would feel the disappointment less if I convinced you by ocular demonstration."

Walking cautiously forward to the dangerous angle, he grasped a broken edge of the rock outcrop about which

the path twisted, and pressed hard with both feet upon the edge of the narrow causeway. It was a hazardous experiment, and the result of it startling, for there was a crash and a rattle, and Geoffrey remained clinging to the rock, with one foot in a cranny, while a mass of earth and timber slid down the steep-pitched slope and disappeared over the face of the crag. A hollow splashing rose suggestively from far beneath the rock. Helen, who had been too angry to notice the consideration for herself implied in the man's last speech, turned her eyes upon the ground and did not raise them until, after swinging himself carefully onto firmer soil, Geoffrey approached her. "I hope, after what you have seen, you will forgive me for preventing your descent," he said.

"You used considerable violence, and I am still unconvinced," Helen declared, rising as she spoke. "In any case, you have at least made further progress impossible, and we may as well retrace our steps. No; I do not wish to hear any more upon the subject. It is really not worth further discussion."

They turned back together. When the ascent grew steeper, Geoffrey held out his hand. Instead of accepting the proffered assistance as she had done when they descended, Helen apparently failed to notice the hand, and the homeward journey was not pleasant to either of them. Helen did not parade her displeasure, but Geoffrey was sensible of it, and, never being a fluent speaker upon casual subjects, he was not successful in his conversational efforts. When at last they reached the villa, he shook his shoulders disgustedly as he recalled some of his inane remarks.

"It was hardly a wonder she was silent. Heavens, what prompted me to drivel in that style?" he reflected. "It was cruelly unfortunate, but I could not let her risk her precious safety over that confounded path!"

At luncheon it happened that Mrs. Savine said: "I saw you going towards the White Rock Cove, Helen.

Very interesting place, isn't it, Mr. Thurston? But you brought none of that lovely weed back with you."

"Did you notice how I had the path graded as you went down?" asked Savine, and Thurston saw that Helen's eyes were fixed upon him. The expression of the eyes aroused his indignation because the glance was not a challenge, but a warning that whatever his answer might be, the result would be indifferent to her. He was hurt that she should suppose for a moment that he would profit by this opportunity.

"We were not able to descend the whole way," he replied. "Last winter's rains have loosened the surface soil, and one angle of the path slipped bodily away. Very fortunately I was some distance in advance of Miss Savine, and there was not the slightest danger. Might I suggest socketed timbers? The occurrence reminds me of a curious accident to the railroad track in the Rockies."

Helen did not glance at the speaker again, for Savine asked no awkward questions. But Thurston saw no more of her during the afternoon. That evening he sought Savine in his study.

"You have all been very kind to me," he said. "In fact, so much so that I feel, if I stay any longer among you, I shall never be content to rough it when I go back to the bush. This is only too pleasant, but, being a poor man with a living to earn, it would be more consistent if I recommenced my work. Which of the operations should I undertake first?"

Savine smiled on him whimsically, and answered with Western directness:

"I don't know whether the Roads Surveyor was right or wrong when he said that you were not always over-civil. See here, Thurston, leaving all personal amenities out of the question, I'm inclined to figure that you will be of use to me, and the connection also will help you considerably. My paid representatives are not always so energetic as they might be. So if you are tired of High

Maples you can start in with the rock-cutting on the new wagon road. It is only a detail, but I want it finished, and, as the cars would bring you down in two hours' time, I'll expect you to put in the week-end here, talking over more important things with me."

Thurston left the house next morning. He did not see Helen to say good-by to her, for she had ridden out into the forest before he departed from High Maples. Helen admitted to herself that she was interested in Thurston, the more so because he alone, of all the men whom she had met, had successfully resisted her will. But she shrank from him, and though convinced that his action in preventing her from going down the pathway had been justified, she could not quite forgive him.

CHAPTER X

SAVINE'S CONFIDENCE

DESPITE his employer's invitation Thurston did not return to High Maples at the end of the week. The rock-cutting engrossed all his attention, and he was conscious that it might be desirable to allow Miss Savine's indignation to cool. He had thought of her often since the day that she gave him the dollar, and, at first still smarting under the memory of another woman's treachery, had tried to analyze his feelings regarding her. The result was not very definite, though he decided that he had never really loved Millicent, and was very certain now that she had wasted little affection upon him. One evening at Graham's ranch when they had stood silently together under the early stars, he had become suddenly conscious of the all-important fact, that his life would be empty without Helen Savine, and that of all the women whom he had met she alone could guide and raise him towards a higher plane.

It was characteristic of Geoffrey Thurston that the determination to win her in spite of every barrier of wealth and rank came with the revelation, and that, at the same time counting the cost, he realized that he must first bid boldly for a name and station, and with all patience bide his time. A more cold-blooded man might have abandoned the quest as hopeless at the first, and one more impulsive might have ruined his chances by rashness, but Geoffrey united the characteristics of the reckless Thurstons with his mother's cool North Country canniness.

It therefore happened that Savine, irritated by a journalistic reference to the tardiness of that season's road-

making, went down to see how the work entrusted to Geoffrey was progressing. He was accompanied by his daughter, who desired to visit the wife of a prosperous rancher. It was towards noon of a hot day when they alighted from their horses in the mouth of a gorge that wound inland from the margin of a lake. No breath of wind ruffled the steely surface of the lake. White boulder and somber fir branch slept motionless, reflected in the crystal depths of the water, and lines of great black cedars, that kept watch from the ridge above, stood mute beneath the sun.

As they picked their path carefully through the débris littering an ugly rent in the rock, where perspiring men were toiling hard with pick and drill, they came upon Thurston before he was aware of them. Geoffrey stood with a heavy hammer in his hand critically surveying a somewhat seedy man who was just then offering his services. Savine, who had a sense of humor, was interested in the scene, and said to his daughter: "Thurston's busy. We'll just wait until he's through with that fellow."

Geoffrey, being ignorant of their presence, decided that the applicant, who said that he was an Englishman, and used to estimating quantities, would be of little service; but he seldom refused to assist a stranger in distress.

"I do all the draughting and figuring work myself," he said. "However, if you are hard up you can earn two dollars a day wheeling broken rock until you find something better."

The man turned away, apparently not delighted at the prospect of wheeling rock, and Geoffrey faced about to greet the spectators.

"I don't fancy you'll get much work out of that fellow," observed Savine.

"I did not expect to see you so soon, and am pleasantly surprised," said Geoffrey, who, warned by something in Helen's face, restrained the answer he was about to make.

"You will be tired after your rough ride, and it is very hot out here. If you will come into my office tent I can offer you some slight refreshment."

Helen noticed every appointment of the double tent which was singularly neat and trim. Its flooring of packed twigs gave out a pleasant aromatic odor. The instruments scattered among the papers on the maple desk were silver-mounted. The tall, dusty man in toil-stained jean produced thin glasses, into which he poured mineral waters and California wine. A tin of English biscuits was passed with the cooling drinks. Thurston was a curious combination, she fancied, for, having seen him covered with the grime of hard toil she now beheld him in a new rôle—that of host.

They chatted for half-an-hour, and then there was an interruption, for the young Englishman, who had grown tired of wheeling the barrow, stood outside the tent demanding to see his employer. Geoffrey strode out into the sunshine.

The stranger said that he had a backache, besides blisters on his hands, and that wheeling a heavy barrow did not agree with him. He added, with an easy assurance that drew a frown to the contractor's face, "It's a considerable come-down for me to have to work hard at all, and I was told you were generally good to a distressed countryman. Can't you really give me anything easier?"

"I try to be helpful to my countrymen when they're worth it," answered Geoffrey, dryly. "Would you care to hold a rock drill, or swing a sledge instead?"

"I hardly think so," he returned dubiously. "You see, I haven't been trained to manual labor, and I'm not so strong as you might think by looking at me." Geoffrey lost his temper.

"The drill might blister your fingers, I dare say," he admitted. "I'm afraid you are too good for this rude country, and I have no use for you. I could afford to be decent? Perhaps so, but I earn my money with con-

siderably more effort than you seem willing to make. The cook will give you dinner with the other men to-day; then you can resume your search for an easy billet. We have no room in this camp for idlers."

Savine chuckled, but Helen, who had a weakness for philanthropy, and small practical experience of its economic aspect, flushed with indignation, pitying the stranger and resenting what she considered Thurston's brutality. Her father rose, when the contractor came in, to say that he wanted to look around the workings. He suggested that Helen should remain somewhere in the shade. When Thurston had placed a canvas lounge for her, outside the tent, the girl turned towards him a look of severe disapproval. "Why did you speak to that poor man so cruelly?" she asked. "Perhaps I am transgressing, but it seems to me that one living here in comfort, even comparative luxury, might be a little more considerate towards those less fortunate."

"Please remember that I was once what you term 'less fortunate' myself," Geoffrey reminded Helen, who answered quickly, "One would almost fancy it was you who had forgotten."

"On the contrary, I am not likely to forget how hard it was for me to earn my first fee here in this new country," he declared, looking straight at her. "I was glad to work up to my waist in ice-water to make, at first, scarcely a dollar and a half a day. One must exercise discretion, Miss Savine, and that man, so far as I could see, had no desire to work."

It was a pity that Geoffrey did not explain that he meant Bransome's payment by the words "my first fee," for Helen had never forgotten how she had failed in the attempt to double the amount for which he had bargained. She had considered him destitute of all the gentler graces, but now she was surprised that he should apparently attempt to wound her.

"Is it right to judge so hastily?" she inquired, master-

ing her indignation with difficulty. "The poor man may not be fit for hard work—I think he said so—and I cannot help growing wrathful at times when I hear the stories which reach me of commercial avarice and tyranny."

Geoffrey blew a silver whistle, which summoned the foreman to whom he gave an order.

"Your *protégé* shall have an opportunity of proving his willingness to be useful by helping the cook," Thurston said with a smile at Helen.

"Why did you do that—now?" she asked, uncertain whether to be gratified or angry, and Geoffrey answered, "Because I fancied it would meet with your approval."

"Then," declared Helen looking past him, "if that was your only motive, you were mistaken."

The conversation dragged after that, and they were glad when Savine returned to escort his daughter part of the way to the ranch. When he rode back into camp alone an hour later, he dismounted with difficulty, and his face was gray as he reeled into the tent.

"Give me some wine, Thurston—brandy if you have it, and don't ask questions. I shall be better in five minutes—I hope," he gasped.

Geoffrey had no brandy, but he broke the neck off a bottle of his best substitute, and Savine lay very still on a canvas lounge, gripping one of its rails hard for long, anxious minutes before he said, "It is over, and I am myself again. Hope I didn't scare you!"

"I was uneasy," Thurston replied. "Dare I ask, sir, what the trouble was?" Savine, who evidently had not quite recovered, looked steadily at the speaker. "I'll tell you in confidence, but neither my daughter nor my rivals must hear of this," he said at length. "It is part of the price I paid for success. I have an affection of the heart, which may snuff me out at any moment, or leave me years of carefully-guarded life."

"I don't quite understand you, but perhaps I ought to

suggest that you sit still and keep quiet for a time," Geoffrey replied and Savine answered, "No. Save for a slight faintness I am as well as—I usually am. When one gets more than his due share of this world's good things, he must generally pay for it—see? If you don't, remember as an axiom that one can buy success too dearly. Meantime, and to come back to this question's every-day aspect, I want your promise to say nothing of what you have seen. Helen must be spared anxiety, and I must still pose as a man without a weakness, whatever it costs me."

"You have my word, sir!" said Geoffrey, and Savine, who nodded, appeared satisfied.

"As I said before, I can trust you, Thurston, and though I've many interested friends I'm a somewhat lonely man. I don't know why I should tell you this, it isn't quite like me, but the seizure shook me, and I just feel that way. Besides, in return for your promise, I owe you the confidence. Give me some more wine, and I'll try to tell you how I spent my strength in gaining what is called success."

"I won by hard work; started life as a bridge carpenter, and starved myself to buy the best text-books," Savine began presently. "Bid always for something better than what I had, and generally got it; ran through a big bridge-building contract at twenty-five, and fell in love with my daughter's mother when I'd finished it. I had risen at a bound from working foreman—she was the daughter of one of the proudest poverty-stricken Frenchmen in old Quebec. Well, it would make a long story, but I married her, and she taught me much worth knowing, besides helping me on until, when I had all my savings locked up in apparently profitless schemes, I tried for a great bridge contract. I also got it, but there was political jobbery, and the opposition, learning from my rival how I was fixed, required a big deposit before the agreement was signed."

Savine paused a full minute, and helped himself to more wine before he proceeded. "The deposit was to be paid in fourteen days from the time I got the notice, or the tender would be advertised for again, and I hadn't half the amount handy. I couldn't realize on my possessions without an appalling loss, but I swore I would hold on to that contract, and I did it. It was always my way to pick up any odd information I could, and I learned that a certain mining shaft was likely to strike high-pay ore. I got the information from a workman who left the mine to serve me, so I caught the first train, made a long journey, and rode over a bad pass to reach the shaft. How I dealt with the manager doesn't greatly matter, but though I neither bribed nor threatened him he showed me what I wanted to see. I rode back over pass and down moraine through blinding snow, went on without rest or sleep to the city, borrowed what I could—I wasn't so well known then, and it was mighty little—and bought up as much of that mine's stock on margins as the money would cover. The news was being held back, but other men were buying quietly. Still—well, they had to sleep and get their dinners, and I, who could do without either, came out ahead of them. Market went mad in a day or two over the news of the crushing. I sold out at a tremendous premium, and started to pay my deposit. I did it in person, came back with the sealed contract—hadn't eaten decently or slept more than a few hours in two anxious weeks—went home triumphant, and collapsed—as I did not long ago—while I told my wife."

There was silence for several minutes inside the tent. Then Geoffrey said, "I thank you for your confidence, sir, and will respect it, but even yet I am not quite certain why, considering that you held my unconditional promise, you gave it me."

"As I said before, I felt like it," answered Savine. "Still, there's generally a common-sense reason somewhere for what I do, and it may help you to understand

me. I heard of you at your first beginning. I figured that you were taking hold as I had done before you and thought I might have some use for a man like you. Perhaps I'll tell you more, if we both live long enough, some day."

It was in the cool of the evening that Savine and his daughter, who had been waiting at a house far down the trail, rode back towards the railroad, leaving Geoffrey puzzled at the uncertain ways of women.

"What do you think of my new assistant, Helen?" asked Savine. "You generally have a quick judgment, and you haven't told me yet."

"I hardly know," was the answer. "He is certainly a man of strong character, but there is something about him which repels one—something harsh, almost sinister, though this would, of course, in no way affect his business relations with you. For instance, you saw how he lives, and yet he turned away a countryman who appeared destitute and hungry."

Savine laughed. "You did not see how he lived. The good things in his tent were part of his business property, handy when some mining manager, who may want work done, comes along—or perhaps brought in by mounted messenger for Miss Savine's special benefit. Thurston lives on pork and potatoes, and eats them with his men. The fellow you pitied was a lazy tramp. It mayn't greatly matter to you or me, but Thurston will do great things some day."

"It is perhaps possible," assented Helen. "The men who are hard and cruel are usually successful. You have rather a weakness, father, for growing enthusiastic over what you call a live assistant. You have sometimes been mistaken, remember."

CHAPTER XI

AN INSPIRATION

More than twelve months had passed since Thurston's first visit to High Maples, when he stood one morning gazing abstractedly down a misty valley. Below him a small army of men toiled upon the huge earth embankments, which, half-hidden by thin haze, divided the river from the broad swamps behind it. But Geoffrey scarcely saw the men. He was looking back upon the events of the past year, and was oblivious to the present. He had made rapid progress in his profession and had won the esteem of Julius Savine; but he felt uncertain as to how far he had succeeded in placating Miss Savine. On some of his brief visits to High Maples, Helen had treated him with a kindliness which sent him away exultant. At other times, however, she appeared to avoid his company. Presently dismissing the recollection of the girl with a sigh, Geoffrey glanced at the strip of paper in his hand. It was a telegraphic message from Savine, and ran:

"Want you and all the ideas you can bring along at the chalet to-morrow. Expect deputation and interesting evening."

Savine had undertaken the drainage of the wide valley, which the rising waters periodically turned into a morass, and had sublet to Geoffrey a part of the work. Each of the neighboring ranchers who would benefit by the undertaking had promised a pro-rata payment, and the Crown authorities had conditionally granted to Savine a percentage of all the unoccupied land he could reclaim. Previous operations had not, however, proved successful, for the

snow-fed river breached the dykes, and the leaders of a syndicate with an opposition scheme were not only sowing distrust among Savine's supporters, but striving to stir up political controversy over the concession.

Geoffrey did not agree with the contractor on several important points, but deferred to the older man's judgment. He had, however, already made his mark, and could have obtained profitable commissions from both mining companies and the smaller municipalities, had he desired them.

While Geoffrey was meditating, the mists began to melt before a warm breeze from the Pacific. Sliding in filmy wisps athwart the climbing pines, they rolled clear of the river, leaving bare two huge parallel mounds, between which the turbid waters ran. Geoffrey, surveying the waste of tall marsh grasses stretching back to the forest, knew that a rich reward awaited the man who could reclaim the swamp. He was reminded of his first venture, which was insignificant compared to this greater one, and as suddenly as the mists had melted, the uncertainty in his own mind concerning Savine's plan vanished too, and he saw that the contractor was wrong. What he had done for Bransome on a minute scale must be done here on a gigantic one. A bold man, backed with capital, might blast a pathway for the waters through the converging rocks of the cañon, and, without the need of costly dykes, both swamp and the wide blue lake at the end of the valley would be left dry land. He stood rigidly still for ten minutes while his heart beat fast. Then he strode hurriedly towards the gap in the ranges. There was much to do before he could obey Savine's summons.

It was towards the close of that afternoon when Julius Savine lounged on the veranda of a wooden hotel for tourists, which was built in a gorge of savage beauty. In spite of all that modern art could do, the building looked raw and new, out of place among the immemorial pines climbing towards snowy heights unsullied by the presence

of man. Helen, who sat near her father, glanced at him keenly before she said:

"You have not looked well all day. Is it the hot weather, or are you troubled about the conference to-night?"

Savine at first made no reply. The furrows deepened on his forehead, and Helen felt a thrill of anxiety as she watched him. She had noticed that his shoulders were losing their squareness, and that his face had grown thin.

"I must look worse than I feel," he declared after a little while, "but, though there is nothing to worry about, the reclamation scheme is a big one, and some of my rancher friends seem to have grown lukewarm latterly. If they went over to the opposition, the plea that my workings might damage their property, if encouraged by meddlesome politicians, would seriously hamper me. Still, I shall certainly convince them, and that is why I am receiving the deputation to-night. I wish Thurston had come in earlier; I want to consult with him."

"What has happened to you?" asked Helen, laying her hand affectionately upon his arm. "You never used to listen to anybody's opinions, and now you are always consulting Thurston. Sometimes I fancy you ought to give up your business before it wears you out. After all, you have not known Thurston long."

"Perhaps so," Savine admitted, and when he looked at her Helen became interested in an eagle, which hung poised on broad wings above the valley. "I feel older than I used to, and may quit business when I put this contract through. It is big enough to wind up with. If I'd known Thurston for ages I couldn't be more sure of him. I am a little disappointed that you don't like him."

"You go too far." Helen still concentrated her attention upon the dusky speck against the blue. "I have no reason for disliking Mr. Thurston; indeed, I do not

dislike him and my feeling may be mere jealousy. You give—him—most of your confidences now, and I should hate anybody who divided you from me."

Savine lifted her little hand into his own, and patted it playfully as he answered:

"You need never fear that. Helen, you are very like your mother as she was thirty years ago."

There was a sparkle of indignation in Helen's eyes, and a suspicion of tell-tale color in her face. She remembered that, when he first met her mother, her father's position much resembled Thurston's, and the girl wondered if he desired to remind her of it.

"The cars are in sight. Perhaps I had better see whether the hotel people are ready for your guests," she remarked with indifference.

The hotel was famous for its cuisine, and the dinner which followed was, for various reasons, a memorable one, though some of the guests appeared distinctly puzzled by the sequence of viands and liquors. Still, even those who, appreciating the change from leathery venison and grindstone bread, had eaten too much at the first course, struggled manfully with the succeeding, and good fellowship reigned until the cloth was removed, and the party prepared to discuss business.

Savine sat at the head of the table, the gray now showing thickly in his hair. His expression was, perhaps, too languid, for one of his guests whispered that the daring engineer was not what he used to be. The man glanced at Thurston, who sat, stalwart, keen, and determined of face, beside his chief, and added, "I know which I'd sooner run up against now; and it wouldn't be his deputy, sub-contractor, or whatever the fellow is."

"Finding that our correspondence was using up no end of time and ink, I figured it would be better for us to talk things over together comfortably, and as some of you come from Vancouver, and some from round the lake, this place appeared a convenient center," began Savine. "Now,

gentlemen, I'm ready to discuss either business or anything else you like."

There was a murmur, and the guests looked at one another. They were a somewhat mixed company—several speculators from the cities, two credited with political influence; well-educated Englishmen, who had purchased land in the hope of combining sport with cattle raising; and wiry axemen, who lived in rough surroundings while they drove their clearings further into the forest, field by field.

"Then I'll start right off with business," said a city man. "I bought land up yonder and signed papers backing you. I thought there would be a boom in the valley when you got through, but I've heard some talk lately to the effect that the river is going to beat you, and, in any case, you're making slow headway. What I, what we all, want to know is, when you're going to have the undertaking completed."

Applause and a whispering followed, and another man said, "Our sentiments exactly! Guess you've seen *The Freespeaker's* article!"

"I have," Savine acknowledged coolly. "It suggested that I have no intention of carrying out my agreement, that I am hoodwinking the authorities for some indefinite purpose mysteriously connected with maintaining our present provincial rulers in power. The thing's absurd on the face of it, when I'm spending my money like water, and you ought to know me better. I won't even get the comparatively insignificant bonus until the work is finished."

Several of the listeners rapped upon the table, one or two growled suspiciously, and a big sunburnt Englishman stood up. "We'll let the article in question pass," he said. "It is clearly written with personal animus. As you say, we know you better; but see here, Savine, this is going to be a serious business for us if you fail. We've helped you with free labor, hauled your timber in, lent you oxen, and,

in fact, done almost everything, besides giving you our bonds for a good many dollars and signing full approval of your scheme. By doing this we have barred ourselves from encouraging the other fellows' plans."

After similar but less complimentary speeches had been made, Thurston, who had been whispering to Savine, claimed attention. He cast a searching glance round the assembly. "Any sensible man could see that the opposition scheme is impracticable," he declared. "I am afraid some of you have been sent here well primed."

His last remark was perhaps combatant rashness, or possibly a premeditated attempt to force the listeners to reveal their actual sentiments. If he wished to get at the truth, he was successful, for several men began to speak at once, and while disjointed words interloped his remarks, the loudest of them said:

"You can't fool us, Savine. We're poor men with a living to earn, but we're mighty tough, and nobody walks over us with nails in their boots. If you can't hold up that river, where are we going to be? I'd sooner shove in the giant powder to blow them up, than stand by and see my crops and cattle washed out when your big dykes bust."

"So would I," cried several voices, and there was a rapid cross-fire of question and comment. "Not the men to be fooled with." "Stand by our rights; appeal to legislation, and choke this thing right up!" "Can you make your dykes stand water at all?" "Give the man—a fair show." "How many years do you figure on keeping us waiting?"

Savine rose somewhat stiffly from his chair, and Thurston noted an ominous grayness in either cheek.

"There are just two things you can do," Savine said; "appeal to your legislators to get my grants canceled, or sit tight and trust me. For thirty-five years I've done my share in the development of the Dominion, and I never took a contract I didn't put through. This has proved a tough one, but if it costs me my last dollar——"

The honest persons among the malcontents were mostly struggling men, who, having expected the operations would bring them swift prosperity, had been the more disappointed. Still, the speaker's sincerity inspired returning confidence, and, when he paused, there was a measure of sympathy for him, for he seemed haggard and ill, and was one against many. His guests began to wonder whether they had not been too impatient and suspicious, and one broke in apologetically, "That's good! We're not unreasonable. But we like straight talking—what if the dykes keep on bursting?"

Then there was consternation, for Savine collapsed into his chair, after he had said, "Mr. Thurston will tell you. Remember he acts for me." To Geoffrey he whispered, "I don't feel well. Help me out, and then go back to them."

"Sit still. Stand back! You have done rather too much already," Geoffrey declared, turning fiercely upon the men, who hurried forward, one with a water decanter, and another with a wine glass.

The guests fell back before Thurston, as he led Savine, who leaned heavily upon him, from the banquet room. As they entered a broad hall Helen and her aunt passed along the veranda upon which it opened.

"They must not know; keep them out!" gasped the contractor. "Get me some brandy and ring for the steward—quick. You have got to go back and convince those fellows, Thurston. Good Lord!—this is agony."

Savine sank into a chair. His twitching face was livid, and great beads of moisture gathered upon his forehead. Thurston pressed a button, then strode swiftly towards the door hoping that Helen, who passed outside with a laugh upon her lips, might be spared the sight of her father's suffering. But Mrs. Savine, gazing in through a long window, started as she exclaimed, "Helen, your father's very sick! Run along and bring me the elixir out of my valise."

Helen turned towards the window, and Geoffrey, who groaned inwardly, placed himself so that she could not see. There was a rustle of skirts, and swift, light footsteps approached.

"What is the matter? Why do you stand there? Let me pass at once!" cried Helen in a voice trembling with fear.

"Please wait a few moments," answered Geoffrey, standing between the suffering man and his daughter. "Your father will be better directly, and you must not excite him."

There was no mistaking the color in Helen's face now. If her eyes were anxious the crimson in her cheeks and on her forehead was that of anger. Geoffrey felt compassionate, but he was still determined to spare her.

"For your father's sake and your own, don't go to him just yet, Miss Savine," he pleaded, but, with little fingers whose grip felt steely, the girl wrenched away his detaining arm.

"Is there no limit to your interference or presumption?" she asked, sweeping past him to fall with a low cry beside the big chair upon which her father was reclining. The cry pierced to Thurston's heart.

Helen had seen little of either sickness or tragedy. Savine sat still as if he did not see her, his face contracted into a ghastly grin of pain. The attendant who came to them deftly aided Geoffrey to force a little cordial between the sufferer's teeth. Savine made no sign, Forgetting her indignation in her terror Helen glanced at Geoffrey in vague question, but he merely raised his hand with a restraining gesture.

"We had better get him onto a sofa, sir," whispered the attendant, presently. "Not very heavy. Perhaps you and I could manage." It was when he was being lifted that Savine first showed signs of intelligence. He glanced at Geoffrey and attempted to beckon towards the room they had left. When he seemed slightly better, Thurston said:

"I am going, sir. Stay here a few minutes, and then call somebody, waiter. I cannot stay any longer."

Savine made an approving gesture, but Helen said with fear and evident surprise, "You will not leave us now, Mr. Thurston?"

"I must," answered Geoffrey, restraining an intense longing to stay since she desired it, but loyal to his master's charge. "I believe your father is recovering, and it is his especial wish. I can do nothing, and he needs only quiet."

Helen said nothing further. She began to chafe her father's hand, while Thurston went back, pale and grim, to the head of the long table.

"Mr. Savine was seized by a passing faintness, but is recovering," he said. "Nevertheless, he may not be able to return, and, as I am interested with him in the drainage scheme he has appointed me his deputy. Therefore, in brief answer to your questions, I would say that if either of us lives you shall have good oat fields instead of swamp grass and muskeg. It is a solemn promise—we intend to redeem it."

"I want to ask just two questions," announced a sun-bronzed man, in picturesque jacket of fringed deerskin. "Who are the—we; and how are you going to build dykes strong enough to stand the river when the lake's full of melting snow and sends the water down roaring under a twenty-foot head?"

The speaker had touched the one weak spot in Savine's scheme, but Geoffrey rose to the occasion, and there was a wondering hush when he said, "In answer to the first question—Julius Savine and I are the 'we.' Secondly, we will, if necessary, obliterate the lake. It can be done."

The boldness of the answer from a comparatively unknown man held the listeners still, until there were further questions and finally, amid acclamation, one of the party said:

"Then it's a bargain, and we'll back you solid through

thick and thin. Isn't that so, gentlemen? If the opposition try to make legal trouble, as the holders of the cleared land likely to be affected we've got the strongest pull. We came here doubting; you have convinced us."

"I hardly think you will regret it," Geoffrey assured them. "Now, as I must see to Mr. Savine, you will excuse me."

Savine lay breathing heavily when Geoffrey rejoined him, but he demanded what had happened, and nodded approval when told. Then Geoffrey withdrew, beckoning to Helen, who rose and followed him.

"This is no time for useless recrimination, or I would ask how you could leave one who has been a generous friend, helpless and suffering," the girl said reproachfully. "My father is evidently seriously ill, and you are the only person I can turn to, for the hotel manager tells me there is no doctor within miles of us. So in my distress I must stoop to ask you, for his sake, what I can do?"

"Will you believe not only that I sympathize, but that I would gladly have given all I possess to save you from this shock?" Thurston began, but Helen cut him short by an impatient wave of the hand, and stood close beside him with distress and displeasure in her eyes.

"All that is outside the question—what can we do?" she asked imploringly.

"Only one thing," answered Geoffrey. "Bring up the best doctor in Vancouver by special train. I'm going now to hold up the fast freight. Gather your courage. I will be back soon after daylight with skilled assistance."

He went out before the girl could answer, and, comforted, Helen hurried back to her father's side. Whatever his failings might be, Thurston was at least a man to depend upon when there was need of action.

There was a little platform near the hotel where trains might be flagged for the benefit of passengers, but the office was locked. Thurston, who knew that shortly a freight train would pass, broke in the window, borrowed

a lantern, lighted it, and hurried up the track which here wound round a curve through the forest and over a trestle. It is not pleasant to cross a lofty trestle bridge on foot in broad daylight, for one must step from sleeper to sleeper over wide spaces with empty air beneath, and, as the ties are just wide enough to carry the single pair of rails, it would mean death to meet a train. Geoffrey nevertheless pressed on fast, the light of the blinking lantern dazzling his eyes and rendering it more difficult to judge the distances between the ties—until he halted for breath a moment in the center of the bridge. White mist and the roar of hurrying water rose out of the chasm beneath, but another sound broke through the noise of the swift stream. Geoffrey hear the vibratory rattle of freight cars racing down the valley, and he went on again at a reckless run, leaping across black gulfs of shadow.

The sound had gained in volume when he reached firm earth and ran swiftly towards the end of the curve, from which, down a long declivity, the engineer could see his lantern. Panting, he held the light aloft as a great fan-shaped blaze of radiance came flaming like a comet down the track.

Soon he could dimly discern the shape of two huge mountain engines, while the rails trembled beside him, and a wall of rock flung back the din of whirring wheels. The fast freight had started from the head of Atlantic navigation at Montreal, and would not stop until the huge cars rolled alongside the Empress liner at Vancouver, for part of their burden was being hurried West from England around half the world to China and the East again. The track led down-grade, and the engineers, who had nursed the great machines up the long climb to the summit, were now racing them down hill.

Waving the lantern Geoffrey stood with a foot on one of the rails and every sense intent, until the first engine's cow-catcher was almost upon him. Then he leaped for his life and stood half-blinded amid whirling ballast and

a rushing wind, as, veiled in thick dust, the great box cars clanged by. He was savage with dismay, for it seemed that the engineer had not seen his signal; then his heart bounded, a shrill hoot from two whistles was followed by the screaming of brakes. When he came up with the standing train at the end of the trestle, one engineer, leaning down from the rail of the cab, said:

"I saw your light away back, but was too busy trying to stop without smashing something to answer. Say, has the trestle caved in, or what in the name of thunder is holding us up?"

"The trestle is all right," answered Geoffrey, climbing into the cab. "I held you up, and I'm going on with you to bring out a doctor to my partner, who is dangerously ill."

The engineer's comments were indignant and sulphurous, while the big fireman turned back his shirt sleeves as if preparing to chastise the man rash enough to interfere with express freight traffic. Geoffrey, reaching for a shovel, said:

"When we get there, I'll go with you to your superintendent at Vancouver; but, if either of you try to put me off or to call assistance, I'll make good use of this. I tell you it's a question of life and death, and two at least of your directors are good friends of the man I want to help. They wouldn't thank you for destroying his last chance. Meantime you're wasting precious moments. Start the train."

"Hold fast!" commanded the grizzled engineer, opening the throttle. "When she's under way, I'll talk to you, and unless you satisfy me, by the time we reach Vancouver there won't be much of you left for the police to take charge of."

Then the two locomotives started the long cars on their inter-ocean race again.

CHAPTER XII

GEOFFREY TESTS HIS FATE

It was a lowering afternoon in the Fall, when Thurston and Julius Savine stood talking together upon a spray-drenched ledge in the depths of a British Columbian cañon. On the crest of the smooth-scarped hillside, which stretched back from the sheer face of rock far overhead, stood what looked like a tiny fretwork in ebony, and consisted of two-hundred-foot conifers. Here and there a clamorous torrent had worn out a gully, and, with Thurston's assistance, Savine had accomplished the descent of one of the less precipitous. Elsewhere the rocks had been rubbed into smooth walls, between which the river had fretted out its channel during countless ages. The water was coming down in a mad green flood, for the higher snows had melted fast under the autumn sun, and the clay beneath the glaciers had stained it. Foam licked the ledges, a roaring white wake streamed behind each boulder's ugly head, and the whole gloomy cañon rang with the thunder of a rapid, whose filmy stream whirled in the chilly breeze.

Savine gazed at the rapid and the whirlpool that fed it, distinguishing the roar of scoring gravel and grind of broken rock from its vibratory booming, and though he was a daring man, his heart almost failed him.

"It looks ugly, horribly ugly, and I doubt if another man in the Dominion would have suggested tackling the river here, but you are right," he admitted. "Human judgment has its limits, and the constant bursts have proved that no dykes which wouldn't ruin me in the building could stand high-water pressure long. If you don't mind, Thurston, we'll move farther from the edge. I've been a little shaky since that last attack."

"The climb down was awkward, but you have looked better lately," declared Geoffrey and Savine sighed.

"I guess my best days are done, and that is one reason why I wish to end up with a big success," he said. "I got a plain warning from the Vancouver doctor you brought me in that morning. You managed it smartly."

"I was lucky," said Thurston, laughing. "At first, I expected to be ignominiously locked up after the engineer and fireman had torn my clothes off me. But we did not climb down here to talk of that."

"No!" and Savine looked straight at his companion. "This is a great scheme, Thurston, the biggest I have ever undertaken. There will be room for scores of ranches, herds of cattle, wheat fields and orchards, if we can put it through—and we have just got to put it through. Those confounded dykes have drained me heavily, and they'll keep right on costing money. Still, even to me, it looks almost beyond the power of mortal man to deepen the channel here. The risk will figure high in money, but higher in human life. You feel quite certain you can do it?"

"Yes!" asserted Geoffrey. "I believe I can—in winter, when the frost binds the glaciers and the waters shrink. Once it is done, and the only hard rock barrier that holds the water up removed, the river will scour its own way through the alluvial deposits. I have asked a long price, but the work will be difficult."

Savine nodded. He knew that it would be a task almost fit for demi-gods or giants to cut down the bed of what was a furious torrent, thick with grinding débris and scoring ice, and that only very strong bold men could grapple with the angry waters, amid blinding snow or under the bitter frost of the inland ranges in winter time.

"The price is not too heavy, but I don't accept your terms," Savine said. "Hold on until I have finished and then begin your talking. I'll offer you a minor partnership in my business instead. Take time, and keep your

answer until I explain things in my offices, in case you find the terms onerous; but there are many men in this country who would be glad of the chance you're getting."

Geoffrey stood up, his lean brown face twitching. He walked twice along the slippery ledge, and then halted before Savine. "I will accept them whatever they are on one condition, which I hardly dare hope you will approve," he replied. "That is, regarding the partnership, for in any case, holding to my first suggestion, you can count on my best help down here. I don't forget that I owe you a heavy debt of gratitude, sir, though, as you know, I have had several good offers latterly."

Savine, who had been abstractedly watching the mad rush of the stream, looked up as he inquired:

"What is the condition? You seem unusually diffident to-day, Thurston."

"It is a great thing I am going to ask." Geoffrey, standing on the treacherous ledge above the thundering river, scarcely looked like a suppliant as he put his fate to the test. "It is your permission to ask Miss Savine to marry me when the time seems opportune. It would not be surprising if you laughed at me, but even then I should only wait the more patiently. This is not a new ambition, for one day when I first came, a poor man, into this country I set my heart upon it, and working ever since to realize it, I have, so far at least as worldly prospects go, lessened the distance between us."

Savine, who betrayed no surprise, was silent for a little while. Then he answered quietly:

"I am, according to popular opinion, anything but a poor man, and though those dykes have bled me, such a match would, as you suggest, be unequal from a financial point of view, unless Helen marries against my wishes. Then she should marry without a dollar. Does that influence you?"

Thurston spread out his hands with a contemptuous

gesture, which his quiet earnestness redeemed from being theatrical.

"For my own sake I should prefer it so. Dollars! How far would anyone count dollars in comparison with Miss Savine? But I do not fear being able to earn all she needs. When the time seems opportune the inequality may be less."

"It is possible," continued Savine. "One notices that the man who knows exactly what he wants and doesn't fool his time away over other things not infrequently gets it. You have not really surprised me. Now—and I want a straight answer—why did you leave the Old Country?"

"For several reasons. I lost my money mining. The lady whom I should have married, according to arrangements made for us, tired of me. It is a somewhat painful story, but I was bound up in the mine, and there were, no doubt, ample excuses for her. We were both of us almost too young to know our own minds when we fell in with our relatives' wishes, and, though I hardly care to say so, it was perhaps well we found out our mistake in time."

"Ah!" said Savine. "Were there no openings for a live man in the Old Country, and have you told me all?"

"I could not find any place for a man in my position," Geoffrey let the words fall slowly. "I come of a reckless, hard-living family, and I feared that some of their failings might repeat themselves in me. I had my warnings. Had I stayed over there, a disappointed man, they might have mastered me, and so, when there was nothing to keep me, I turned my back—and ran. Out here any man who hungers for it can find quite sufficient healthful excitement for his needs, and excitement is as wine to me. These, I know, seem very curious qualifications for a son-in-law, but it seemed just to tell you. Need I explain further?"

"No," answered Savine, whose face had grown serious. "Thanks for your honesty. I guess I know the weaknesses you mean—the greatest of them is whiskey. I've had

scores of brilliant men it has driven out from Europe to shovel dirt for me. It's not good news, Thurston. How long have you made head against your inherited failings?"

"Since I could understand things clearly," was the steady answer. "I feared only what might happen, and would never have spoken had I not felt that this country had helped me to break the entail, and set me free. You know all, sir, and to my disadvantage I have put it before you tersely, but there is another aspect."

Thurston's tone carried conviction with it, but Savine cut him short. "It is the practical aspect that appeals to me," he said. He stared down at the river for several minutes before he asked:

"Have you any reason to believe that Helen reciprocates the attachment?"

"No." Geoffrey's face fell. "Once or twice I ventured almost to hope so; more often I feared the opposite. All I ask is the right to wait until the time seems ripe, and know that I shall have your good will if it ever does. I could accept no further benefits from your hands until I had told you."

"You have it now," Savine declared very gravely. "As you know, my life is uncertain, and I believe you faithful and strong enough to take care of Helen. After all, what more could I look for? Still, if she does not like you, there will be an end of the matter. It may be many would blame me for yielding, but I believe I could trust you, Thurston—and there are things they do not know."

Savine sighed after the last words. His face clouded. Then he added abruptly: "Speak when it suits you, Thurston, and good luck to you. There are reasons besides the fact that I'm an old man why I should envy you."

Had Geoffrey been less exultant he might have noticed something curious in Savine's expression, but he was too full of his heart's desire to be conscious of more than the one all-important fact that Helen's father wished him

well. It was in a mood of high hopefulness he assisted Mr. Savine during the arduous scramble up out of the cañon. Later his elation was diminished by the recollection that he had yet to win the good will of Miss Savine.

. . . . . .

Some time had passed after the interview in the cañon, when one afternoon Geoffrey walked out on the veranda at High Maples in search of Helen Savine. It was winter time, but the climate near the southwestern coast is mild. High Maples was sheltered, and the sun was faintly warm. There were a few hardy flowers in the borders fringing the smooth green lawn, a striking contrast to the snow-sheeted pines of the ice-bound wilderness in which Thurston toiled. Helen was not on the veranda, and not knowing where to search further, the young man sank somewhat heavily into a chair. Geoffrey had ridden all night through powdery snow-drifts which rose at times to the stirrup, and at others so high that his horse could scarcely flounder through them. He had made out lists of necessary stores as the jolting train sped on to Vancouver, and had been busy every moment until it was time to start for High Maples. Though he would have had it otherwise, he dare not neglect one item when time was very precious. He had not spared himself much leisure for either food or sleep of late, for by the short northern daylight, and flame of the roaring lucigen, through the long black nights, he and his company of carefully picked men had fought stubbornly with the icy river.

The suns rays grew brighter, there was still no sign of Helen. Tired in mind and body Geoffrey sat still, lost in a reverie. He had left the camp in a state of nervous suspense, but overtaxed nature had conquered, and now he waited not less anxious than he had been, but with a physical languidness due to the reaction.

When Helen Savine finally came out softly through a long window Geoffrey did not at first see her, and she had time to cast more than a passing glance at him as he sat

with head resting gratefully on the back of the basket chair. His face, deeply tanned by the snow, had grown once more worn and thin. There were lines upon the forehead and wrinkles about his eyes; one bronzed hand lay above the other on his knee, as the complement of a pose that suggested the exhaustion of over-fatigue. The sight roused her pity, and she felt unusually sympathetic towards the tired man.

Then Geoffrey started and rose quickly. Helen noticed how he seemed to fling off his weariness as he came towards her, hat in hand.

"I have made a hurried journey to see you, Miss Savine," he said. "I have something to tell you, something concerning which I cannot keep silence any longer. If I am abrupt you will forgive me, but will you listen a few moments, and then answer me a question?"

The man's tone was humble if his eyes were eager, and Helen, who was sensible of a tremor of emotion, leaned against the rails of the veranda. The winter sunlight shone full upon her, and either that or the cold breeze that she had met on the headland accounted for the color in her cheeks. She made a dainty picture in her fur cap and close-fitting jacket, whose rich fur trimming set off the curves of a shapely figure. The man's longing must have shown itself in his eyes, for Helen suddenly turned her glance away from him. Again she felt a curious thrill, almost of pleasure, and wondered at it. If she had guessed his meaning correctly she would have felt merely sorry for him, and yet there was no mistaking an indefinite sense of satisfaction.

"Do you remember what I once told you at Graham's ranch?" he asked. "I was a needy adventurer then, and guilty of horrible presumption, but though the words came without my definite will I meant every one of them. I knew there could be only one woman in the world for me, and I solemnly determined to win her. It seemed madness—I was a poor, unknown man—but the thought of

you drove me resistlessly on until at last the gulf between us has been narrowed, and may be narrower still. That is, I have striven to lessen it in the one way I can—in all others without your help it must remain impassable. Heaven knows how far I am beneath you, and the daring hope has but one excuse—I love you, and shall always do so. Is what I hope for quite impossible?"

While Helen would have told herself ten minutes earlier that she almost disliked the pleader, she was conscious of a new emotion. She had regarded other suitors with something like contempt, but it was not so with Thurston. Even if he occasionally repelled her, it was impossible to despise him.

"I am sorry," she said slowly. "Sorry that you should have told me this, because I can only answer that it is impossible."

Geoffrey evinced no great surprise. His face became stern instead of expectant; his toil-hardened frame was more erect, as he answered with unusual gentleness:

"I have endeavored to prepare myself for your reply. How could I hope to win you—as it were for the asking—easily? Still, though I am painfully conscious of many possible reasons, may I venture to ask why it is impossible, Miss Savine?"

Helen answered: "I am sorry it is so—but why should I pain you? Can you not take my answer without the reasons?"

"No; not if you will give them," persisted Geoffrey. "I have grown accustomed to unpleasant things, and it is to be hoped there is truth in the belief that they are good for one. The truth from your lips would hurt me less. Will you not tell me?"

"I will try if you demand it." Helen, who could not help noticing how unflinchingly he had received what was really a needlessly cold rebuff, hoped she was lucid as she began:

"I have a respect for you, Mr. Thurston, but—how

shall I express it?—also a shrinking. You—please remember, you insisted—seem so hard and overbearing, and while power is a desirable attribute in a man——But will you force me to go on?"

"I beg you to go on," said Geoffrey, with a certain grimness.

"In spite of a popular fallacy, I could not esteem a—a husband I was afraid of. A man should be gentle, pitiful and considerate to all women. Without mutual forbearance there could be no true companionship—and——"

"You are right." Geoffrey's voice was humble without bitterness. "I have lived a hard life, and perhaps it has made me, compared with your standard, brutal. Still, I would ask again, are these all your reasons? Is the other difference between us too great—the distance dividing the man you gave the dollar to from the daughter of Julius Savine?"

"No," answered Helen. "That difference is, after all, imaginary. We do not think over here quite as you do in England, and if we did, are you not a Thurston of Crosbie? But please believe that I am sorry, and—you insisted on the explanation—forgive me if I have said too much. There is a long future before you—and men change their minds."

Geoffrey's face darkened, and Helen, who regretted the last hasty words which escaped her without reflection, watched him intently until he said:

"Musker must have told you about something in my life. But I was not inconstant though the fault was doubtless mine. That is a story which cannot be mentioned again, Miss Savine."

"I had never meant to refer to it," Helen apologized with some confusion, "but since you have mistaken me, I must add that another friend of yours—a lady—gave me a version that bore truth stamped upon the face of it. One could imagine that you would not take kindly to the fate others arranged for you. But how do you know you

are not repeating the same mistake? The fancy which deceived you then may do the same again."

"How do I know?" Geoffrey's voice rang convincingly as he turned upon the questioner, stretched out an arm towards her, and then dropped it swiftly. "I know what love is now, because you have taught me. Listen, Miss Savine, I am as the Almighty made me, a plain—and sometimes an ill-tempered man, who would gladly lay down his life to save you sorrow; but if what you say divides us is all there is, then, as long as you remain Helen Savine, I shall cling fast to my purpose and strive to prove myself worthy. Again, you were right—how could you be otherwise?—but I shall yet convince you that you need not shrink from me."

"It would be wiser to take a definite 'no' for answer," said Helen. "Why should this fancy spoil your life for you?"

"You cannot take all hope from me," Geoffrey declared. "Would you suspect me of exaggerated sentiment, if I said my life has been yours for a long time and is yours now, for it is true. I will go back to the work that is best for me, merely adding that, if ever there is either trouble or adversity in which I can aid you—though God forbid, for your sake, that should ever be so—you have only to send for me."

"I can at least sincerely wish you success in your great undertaking." Helen offered him her hand, and was conscious of a faint disappointment, when, barely touching it, he turned hurriedly away. She watched him cross the lawn towards the stables, and then waited until a rapid thud of hoofs broke the silence of the woods.

"Gone, and I let him carry that hope away!" she said, still looking towards the forest with troubled eyes. "Yesterday I could never have done so, but yesterday he was gone, and now——"

Helen did not finish her sentence, but as the beat of hoofs died away, glanced at the hand which for a moment

had rested in Geoffrey's. "What has happened to me, and is he learning quickly or growing strangely timid?" she asked herself.

Thurston almost rode over Julius Savine near the railroad depot, and reined in his horse to say:

"I have my answer, sir, but do not feel beaten yet. Some unholy luck insists that all my affairs must be mixed with my daily business, and, because of what was said in the cañon, I must ask you, now of all times, to let me hold the option of that partnership or acceptance of the offer I made you until we vanquish the river."

He went off at a gallop as the cars rolled in, leaving Savine smiling dryly as he looked after him.

CHAPTER XIII

A TEST OF LOYALTY

It was during a brief respite from his task, which had been suspended, waiting the arrival of certain tools and material, that Thurston accompanied Savine and Helen to a semi-public gathering at the house of a man who was a power in the Mountain Province just outside Vancouver. Politicians, land-speculators, railroad and shipping magnates were present with their wives and daughters, and most of them had a word for Savine or a glance of admiration for Helen.

Savine moved among guests chatting with the brilliancy which occasionally characterized him, and always puzzled Thurston.

Thurston was rarely troubled by petty jealousies, but the homage all men paid to Helen awoke an unpleasant apprehension within him. He did not know many of the men and women who laughed and talked in animated groups; and at length found himself seated alone in a quiet corner. The ground floor of the rambling house consisted of various rooms, some of which opened with archways into one another. He could see into the one most crowded, where Helen formed the center of an admiring circle. There was no doubt that Miss Savine owed much to the race from which she sprang on her mother's side. Dark beauty, grace of movement, and, when she chose to indulge in it, vivacious speech, all betokened a Latin extraction, while the slight haughtiness, which Thurston thought wonderfully became her, was the dowry of a line of autocratic landowners. That she was pleasant to look upon was proved by the convincing testimony of other men's admiration as well as by his own senses. Now,

when the distance between them was in some respects diminishing, she seemed even further away from him. In her presence he felt himself a plain, unpolished man, and knew he would never shine in the light play of wit and satire which characterized the society for which she was fitted. He decided, also, that she had probably remained unmarried because she could find no one who came up to her standard, and feared that he himself would come very far beneath it. It appeared doubtful that he could ever acquire the gentler virtues Helen had described. Nevertheless, his face grew set as he determined that he could prove his loyalty in the manner that best suited him—by serving her father faithfully.

A capitalist, for whom Geoffrey had undertaken several commissions, halted before him.

"Hello! Quite alone, Thurston, and worrying over something as usual," he began, with Western brusqueness. "What has gone wrong? Have more of your dams burst, up yonder? One would fancy that floundering around through the ice and snow up there would be more congenial than these frivolities. I'm not great on them either, but it's a matter of dollars and cents with me. You perhaps know a little about this self-made—that's your British term, I think—company."

"Not so much as you do," answered Geoffrey. "Still, I have been wondering how some of the men earned their money. I understand that they have sense enough to be proud of their small beginnings, but they do not furnish instructive details as to the precise manner in which they achieved their success."

The capitalist, who was one of the class described, laughed good-humoredly, as he seated himself beside Thurston.

"Well, how are you getting on up in the valley?" he inquired, and Geoffrey's eyes expressed faint amusement as he answered:

"As well as we expected, and, if we had our difficulties,

you would hardly expect me to tell them to a director of the Industrial Enterprise Company."

"Perhaps not!" the capitalist smiled, for the Industrial Enterprise was the corporation which had opposed Savine's reclamation scheme. "Anyway, the company is a speculation with me; my colleagues manage it without much of my assistance. But say, what's the matter with your respected chief? He has come right out of his shell to-night."

The speaker glanced towards Savine, who was surrounded by a group of well-known men.

"I tell you, Thurston, there's something uncanny about that man of late," he continued. "However, knowing there's no use trying to fool you, I'll give you a fair warning and come straight to something I may as well say now as later. Savine will go down like a house of cards some day, and those who lean upon him will find it, in our language, frosty weather. Now, suppose we made you a fair offer, would you join us?"

A curt refusal trembled upon Geoffrey's lips, when he reflected that, as soon as the work was finished, his relations with Savine would be drawn closer still. In the meantime, it was not advisable to give any hint to a possible enemy.

"I couldn't say until I heard what the offer is," he answered cautiously.

"You're a typical cold-blooded Britisher," asserted the other man. "I don't know either. I leave all details to the members of the company; but we've a secretary, who understands all about it, in this house to-night. We're half of us here on business, directly or indirectly, and not for pleasure, so it's possible he may talk to you. But I see our hostess eying us, and it's time we walked along."

They moved forward together, and the woman whom they approached, beckoning Geoffrey, whom she had for some reason taken under her patronage, said:

"There's a countrywoman of yours present, who doesn't know many of our people yet. I should like to present you to her. She comes, I understand, from the same wilds which sheltered you. Mrs. Leslie, this is a special *protégé* of mine, Mr. Thurston, who could give you all information about the mountains in which your husband talks of banishing you."

A handsome, tastefully-dressed woman turned more fully towards them, and for a moment Geoffrey stood still in blank astonishment. The average man would find it disconcerting to be brought, without warning, suddenly face to face in a strange country with a woman who had discarded him, and Thurston showed slight embarrassment.

"Mrs. Henry Leslie! But you evidently know each other!" exclaimed the hostess, whose quick eyes had noticed his startled expression.

Millicent had changed since the last time Geoffrey saw her. She had lost her fresh cream and rose prettiness, but had gained something in place of it, and though her pale blue eyes were too deeply sunk, her face had acquired strength and dignity. She was, as he had always found her, perfectly self-possessed. With a quick glance, which expressed appeal and warning, she said:

"We are not quite strangers. I knew Mr. Thurston in England."

The young Englishman and his countrywoman moved away together, and Geoffrey presently found himself standing in a broad corridor with Millicent's hand upon his arm. Through a long window which opened into a balcony the clear moonlight shone. A wide vista of forest and sparkling sea lured them out of doors.

"A breath of fresh air would be delightful. It would be quiet out there, and I expect you have much to tell me." It was Millicent who spoke, with quiet composure, and her companion wondered at his own lack of feeling. After the first shock of the surprise he was sensible of no

particular indignation or emotion. It seemed as if any tenderness that he had once felt for her had long since disappeared. There was little that he cared to tell her; but, prompted by some impulse which may have been mere curiosity, he drew the window open and they passed out upon the balcony.

"This reminds one of other days," said the woman, with a sigh. "Had I known you were here, I should have dreaded to meet you, but it is very pleasant to see you again. You have surely altered, Geoffrey. I should hardly have expected to find you so friendly."

"I am not in the least inclined to reproach you for the past," was the sober answer. Geoffrey was distinctly perplexed, for he had acquired a clearer perception of Millicent's character since he left England, and now he felt almost indignant with himself for wondering what she wanted. Glancing at her face he was conscious of a certain pity as well as a vague distrust, for it was evident that her life had not been altogether smooth or her health really robust. But the fact that she should recall the far-off days in England jarred upon him.

"It is a relief to learn that you are not angry, at least. What are you doing over here, Geoffrey?" she asked.

"Reclaiming a valley from a river. Living up among the mountains in the snow," was the answer.

"And you like it? You can find happiness in the hard life?"

"Better than anything I ever undertook before. Happiness is a somewhat indefinite term, and, perhaps because I have seldom found leisure to consider whether I am happy or not, the presumption is that I am at least contented."

Millicent sighed and her face grew sad, while Thurston rebelled against an instinctive conviction that she knew a wistful expression was becoming to her and was calculated to appeal to a male observer.

"One could envy you!" she said softly, and Geoffrey,

rising superior to all critical thoughts, felt only sincere pity.

"Have you not been happy in—Canada, Millicent?" he inquired, and if the woman noticed how nearly he had avoided a blunder, which is distinctly probable, she at least made no sign.

"I can't resist the temptation to answer you frankly, Geoffrey," she replied. "I have had severe trials, and some, I fear, have left their mark on me. There are experiences after which one is never quite the same. You heard of the financial disaster which overtook us? Yes? Black days followed it, but Mr. Leslie has hopes of succeeding in this country, and that will brighten the future —indirectly even—for me."

"Ah!" Geoffrey spoke with a peculiar inflection of the voice, for though he could forgive the woman now, he could not forget his resentment towards the man who had supplanted him. "For your sake, I hope he will."

Millicent glanced at him sideways, and, as if anxious to change the subject, asked:

"Is it the Orchard Valley you are endeavoring to reclaim? Yes. I might have guessed it. I have heard people say that the scheme of Mr. Savine, if that is his name, is impracticable. It is characteristic of you, Geoffrey, to play out a losing game, but, with one's future at stake, is it wise?"

"I do not know that I was ever particularly remarkable for wisdom," Geoffrey answered with a shake of the head. "The scheme in question is, however, by no means so impracticable as some persons imagine it to be."

"Then you still hope for success. Have you not failed in one or two of your efforts?"

Millicent's voice was politely indifferent, but a certain keenness in her eyes, which did not escape Geoffrey's notice, betrayed more than a casual interest. Thurston afterwards decided that the shock of the unexpected meeting

had the effect of rendering his perceptions unusually quick.

"I have not been often successful," he admitted, with a laugh, "but my employer is, as you may have heard, a sanguine person, and has not hitherto been beaten."

"I hope he will not be in this instance," said Millicent, and it occurred to Geoffrey that she was concealing a sense of disappointment. They talked a little longer and then she remarked: "I am afraid we have been shamefully neglecting our social duties, but as we shall, in all probability, meet now and then, I hope—in spite of all that has happened—it will be as good friends."

Again the man felt that the meeting had not been brought about wholly by accident, but he bent his head as he answered:

"If ever you should need a friend, you can, for the sake of old times, count on me."

"One of the finest views in the province," said a voice behind them. "We are proud of the prospect from this balcony. If you stand here, Miss Helen, you can enjoy it, and tell me if you have anything better at High Maples. Most romantic spot on such a night for a quiet chat, and if I was only twenty years younger, my dear young lady——" Then the speaker evidently retired with some precipitation from the window, as he added, "No, never mind drawing the curtain, Savine. If she is not over tired I can show your daughter something interesting in the conservatory instead."

"Romantic spot occupied already!" The laugh which accompanied the sound of retreating footsteps and the rustle of drapery, was unmistakably that of Julius Savine.

Geoffrey, who fumed inwardly at the reflection that his attitude was distinctly liable to misconception, straightened himself with perhaps too great a suddenness, while the faint amusement in his companion's face heightened his displeasure. Millicent had managed to obtain a sur-

vey of the intruders, and when sure that they had moved away, she rose, saying, "So that is the beautiful Miss Savine! No doubt you have seen her, and, like all the rest, admire her?"

"Yes," confessed Geoffrey. "I can honestly say I do." Millicent regarded him curiously.

"You have heard that we women seldom praise one another, and therefore, while admitting that she is coldly handsome, I should imagine Miss Savine to be a trying person," she commented. "Now we must return to our social duties—in my case, at least, no one could call them pleasures."

Some little time later Helen, whose eyes had kindled for a moment when her gray-haired escort led her towards the balcony, heard the bluff Canadian answer the question that had been in her mind.

"Who was the lady? Can't exactly say. Her husband's Leslie, the Britisher, who started the land-agency offices, you will remember there was trouble about, and is now, I believe, secretary to the Industrial Enterprise. Frankly, I don't like the man—strikes me as a smart adventurer, and my wife does not take to Mrs. Leslie. The man on the balcony was Thurston, Savine's assistant, and a good fellow. He generally follows humbly in Miss Savine's train, and, considering Leslie's connection with the rival company, I don't quite see what he could be doing in that gallery."

Helen was piqued. She was too proud to admit to herself that she was jealous, but she had not risen superior to all the characteristics of her sex; and, knowing something of her father's business affairs, she was also puzzled. Thurston's attitude towards his companion had not been that of a casual acquaintance, to say the least, and Helen could not help wondering what could be his connection with the wife of one whose interests, she gathered, must be diametrically opposed to her father's. Then, though endeavoring to decide that it did not matter, she deter-

mined to put Thurston to the test at the first opportunity.

Meantime Geoffrey stood alone for a few minutes looking out into the moonlit night. "I am growing brutally suspicious, and poor Millicent has suffered—she can't well hide it," he told himself. "Well, we were fond of each other once, and, whether it's her husband or adversity, whenever I can help her, I must try to do so." It was the revolt of an open nature against the evidence of his senses, but even while Geoffrey framed this resolution something seemed to whisper, "Was she ever fond of you? There is that in the woman's voice which does not ring true."

He had hardly turned back to rejoin the other members of his party when a business acquaintance met him.

"I want you to spare a few minutes for a countryman who has been inquiring about you," said the man. "Mr. Leslie, this is Mr. Thurston—the secretary of the Industrial Enterprise!"

The business acquaintance withdrew, and Geoffrey's lips set tight as he turned towards Leslie who betrayed a certain uneasiness in spite of his nonchalant manner. He was a dark-haired man with a pale face, which had grown more heavy and sensual than it was as Geoffrey remembered it.

"I don't know whether I should say this is a pleasure," Leslie remarked lightly. "There is no use disguising the fact that we last met under somewhat unfortunate circumstances, but I give you my word that it was too late to suggest that my employers should choose another emissary when I discovered your identity. Where commercial interests are concerned, surely we can both rise superior to mere sentiment."

"There are things which it is uncommonly hard to forget," Geoffrey replied coldly. "The question is, however —What do you want with me?" He meant his tone and pose to be anything but conciliatory.

"I want the favor of a business interview before you return," said Leslie, trying to hide his discomfiture, and Geoffrey answered:

"That is hardly possible. I return early to-morrow."

"Can you drive over to my quarters now?"

"No. I desire to see my chief before I go."

"It is confoundedly unfortunate," Leslie commented, apparently glad of some excuse for expressing his disgust. "Well, perhaps nobody will disturb us for a few minutes in yonder corridor. You can regard me as a servant of the Industrial Enterprise. Will you listen to what I have to say?"

"I'm ready to listen to the great Company's secretary," said Geoffrey, with a bluntness under which the other winced, as he turned towards the corridor.

"I'll be brief," began Leslie. "The fact is that we want a capable man accustomed to the planning and construction of irrigation works, and two of our directors rather fancy you. The right man would have full control of practical operations, and I have a tolerably free hand in respect to financial conditions. The main thing we wish to discover is, are you willing to consider an offer of the position?"

It was on the surface a simple business proposition, but Thurston's nostrils dilated and his brows contracted, for he guessed what lay behind it.

"I've heard Savine is a liberal man," continued Leslie, who mistook Thurston's hesitation. "Still, considering your valuable experience in the Orchard Valley, I have power to outbid him. You certainly will not lose financially by throwing in your lot with us."

Then Thurston's anger mastered him, and he flung prudence to the winds.

"Your employers have chosen a worthy messenger," he declared, so fiercely that Leslie recoiled. "Did you suppose that I would sell my benefactor, for that is what it amounts to? Confusion to you and the rogues behind

you! There's another score between us, and I feel greatly tempted to——"

He looked ready to yield to the unmentioned temptation. Leslie, glancing around anxiously, backed away from him, but restrained himself with an effort. Thurston stood panting with rage. There was a sound of approaching footsteps, and the secretary slipped away, leaving the irate engineer face to face with an amused elderly gentleman and Helen Savine. Geoffrey did not know how much or how little they had seen. Helen beckoned to him.

"My father has looked tired during the last hour," she said aside. "I have been warned that excitement may prove dangerous, but hardly care to remind him of it. Would you, as a favor to me, persuade him to return home with you?"

There was no doubt of Thurston's devotion, for Helen had eyes to see, and she sighed a little, but contentedly, when he hurried away. Nevertheless, she was still perplexed, for she had seen Mrs. Leslie looking at him pleadingly, and now Mr. Leslie shrank away from him. Mrs. Leslie was certainly attractive, and yet Helen thought that she knew Thurston's character.

Geoffrey found Savine, who appeared to have suddenly collapsed as if the fire of brilliancy had burned itself out. With more tact than he usually possessed, Thurston persuaded the older man to take his leave.

As they all stood on the broad wooden steps Helen stretched out her hand to Thurston.

"Thank you, Geoffrey," she said softly. "Believe me, I am grateful."

Standing bareheaded beside a pillar, Thurston looked after them as they drove away. It was the first time Helen had called him "Geoffrey," and he fancied that he had seen even more than kindness in her eyes.

"And it is her father whom they tempted me to betray! Damn them!" he growled. "The only honest man

among them included me among those who lean upon Savine! Savine will need a stay himself presently, and one, at least, will not fail him. Ah, again!—what the devil are you wanting?"

The last words were spoken clearly, but Leslie, to whom they were addressed, smiled malevolently.

"It would pay you to be civil," he threatened. "I have no particular reason to love you, and might prove a troublesome enemy. However, because my financial interests, which are bound up with my employers', come first, I warn you that you are foolish to hold on to an associate, who has strong men against him, a speculator whose best days are over. I'll give you time to cool down and think over my suggestion."

"You and I can have no dealings," declared Geoffrey. "What's done cannot be undone—but keep clear of me. As sure as there's a justice, which will bring you to book, even without my help, we'll crush you, if you get in Savine's way, or mine."

"I think this is hardly becoming to either of us, and the next time the Company wants your views it can send another envoy," asserted Leslie.

"In the expressive Western idiom, it would save trouble if you keep on thinking in just that way," Geoffrey rejoined.

The two men parted, Leslie to go back to where Millicent was holding a group of men interested by her forced gayety and Geoffrey to walk slowly out into the moonlight where he could think of Helen and wonder how confidently he might hope to win her love.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WORK OF AN ENEMY

It was a bitter morning when a weary man, sprinkled white with powdery snow, came limping into Thurston's camp, which was then pitched in the cañon. A pitiless wind swept down from the range side across the thrashing pines, and filled the deep rift with its shrill moaning which sounded above the diapason of the shrunken river. A haze of frost-dried snow infinitesimally fine, which stung the unprotected skin like the prick of hot needles, whirled before the wind and then thinned, leaving bare the higher shoulders of the hills, though a rush of dingy vapor hid the ice-ribbed peaks above. The cañon was a scene of appalling desolation, but few of the long-booted men who hurried among the boulders had leisure to contemplate it. The men were working for Geoffrey Thurston, who did not encourage idleness.

So the stranger came almost unnoticed into the center of the camp where Thurston saw him, and asked sharply, "Where do you come from, and what do you want?"

"I'm a frame-carpenter," answered the new arrival. "Got fired from the Hastings saw-mill when work slacked down. Couldn't find anybody who wanted me at Vancouver, so I struck out for the mountains and mines. Found worse luck up here; spent all my money and wore my clothes out, but the boss of the Orchard Mill, who took me for a few days, said I might tell you he recommended me. I'm about played out with getting here, and I'm mighty hungry."

Geoffrey looked the man over, and decided there was truth in the latter part of his story. "Take this spanner and wade across to the reef yonder," he said. "You can

begin by giving aid to those men who are bolting the beams down."

The stranger glanced dubiously at the rush of icy water, thick with jagged cakes of frozen snow, then at his dilapidated foot gear, and hesitated. "I'm not great at swimming. It looks deep," he objected.

"You can walk, I suppose," Geoffrey answered. "If you do, it won't drown you."

The man prepared to obey. He had reached the edge of the water when Geoffrey called him. "I see you're willing, and I'll take you for a few weeks any way," he said. "In the meantime a rest wouldn't do you much harm, and the cook might find you something to keep you from starving until supper, if you asked him civilly."

"Thanks!" the man answered, with a curious expression in his face. "I am a bit used up, and I guess I'll see the cook."

Work proceeded until the winter's dusk fell, when a bountiful supper was served. The stranger, who did full justice to the meal, showed himself a capable hand when work was resumed under the flaring light of several huge lamps. That night two of his new comrades sat in the cook-shed discussing the stranger. One was James Gillow, whom Geoffrey had first employed at Helen's suggestion, and now replaced the man he formerly assisted. He was apparently without ambition, and chiefly remarkable for an antipathy to physical effort. Although he had a good education, he found that cooking suited him. He sat upon an overturned bucket discoursing whimsically, while Mattawa Tom, who acted as Thurston's foreman, peeled potatoes for him. The cook-shanty was warm and snug, and Gillow made those to whom he granted the right of entry work for the privilege.

"Strikes me as queer," said the big axeman, with a grin, when the cook halted to refill his pipe. "Strikes me as queer, it does, that some of you fellows who know so much kin do so little. Knowledge ain't worth a cent un-

less you've got the rustle. Now there's the boss. You talk the same talk, an' he can't well know more than you seem to do, but look where he is, while you stop right down at the bottom running a cook-shanty. Guess you were born tired, English Jim."

"I dare say you're right," answered Gillow. "Other folks in the Old Country have said the same thing, though they didn't put it so neatly. The fact is, some men, like Thurston, are born to wear themselves out trying to manage things, while I was intended for philosophic contemplation. He's occasionally hard to get on with, but since I came here, I'm willing to acknowledge that men of his species are useful, and I have struck harder masters in this great Dominion."

Mattawa Tom laughed hoarsely as he responded: "I should say! You found him hard the day you ran black lines all over his drawings and nearly burnt his shanty up, trying to prove he didn't know his business, when you was brim-full of Red Pine whiskey."

"It was poison," said Gillow, with unruffled good humor. "Several bottles of genuine whiskey would not confuse me, but I have sworn off since the day you mention, partly to oblige Thurston, who seemed to desire it, and because I can't get any decent liquor. But what do you think of our latest acquisition?"

"He kin work, which is more than you could, before the boss taught you," was the dry answer. "But there's something odd about him. You saw the outfit he came in with? Couldn't have swapped it with a Siwash Indian—well, the man has better clothes than you or I on underneath, and if he was so blame hard up, what did he offer Jake five dollars for his old gum boots for?"

"Afraid of wetting his feet. Most sensible person, considering the weather," remarked Gillow, indifferently.

"'Fraid of wetting his feet! This is just where horse sense beats knowledge. That fellow is scared of nothing around this camp. Hasn't it struck you the boss is going

to put through a big contract in a way that's not been tried before, and that there are some folks who would put up a good many dollars to see him let down nicely?"

"Well?" Gillow questioned with a show of interest, and the foreman nodded sagaciously as he answered:

"Whoever busts the boss up will have to get both feet on the neck of Mattawa Tom first, and that's not going to be easy. I'll keep my eyes right on to that fellow."

Tom went out, and Gillow, awakening at midnight, saw that his blankets were still empty. The same thing happened several times, and it was well for Thurston that he had the true leader's gift of inspiring his followers with loyalty, for one night a week later the foreman, who had kept his own counsel, shook Gillow out of his slumber. The sleepy man, who groped for a boot to fling at the disturber of his peace, abandoned the benevolent intention when he saw his comrade's face under the hanging lamp.

"Don't ask no fool questions, but get your things on and come with me," Tom commanded.

Five minutes later Gillow, shivering and reluctant, turned out into the frost. It was a bitter night, and his breath froze upon his mustache. The snow and froth of the river glimmered spectrally, and when they had left the camp some distance behind, there was light enough to see a black figure crawl up a ladder leading to a wire rope stretched tight in mid-air above the torrent. A trolley hung beneath it by means of which men and material were hauled across the chasm.

"Get down here!" whispered Tom. "We'll watch him. If we should fall over any more of these blame rocks he'd see us certain."

Gillow was glad to obey, for, though there was faint moonlight, he had already cut one knee cruelly. It was bitterly cold beneath the boulder where he crouched in the snow, and when the black object, which worked its way along the bending cable, had disappeared in the gloom of overhanging rocks on the opposite shore, there

was nothing to see but the tossing spray of the river. The stream was still a formidable torrent, though now that the feeding snows were frozen fast, it was shrunken far below its summer level. A good many minutes had passed with painful slowness when Gillow, who regretted that he had left the snug cook-shed, said:

"This is distinctly monotonous, and it's about time we struck back to camp. Guess that fellow has tackled too much Red Pine whiskey, and is just walking round to cool himself."

In answer the foreman grasped the speaker's shoulder, and stretched out a pointing hand. The moonlight touched one angle of the rock upon the opposite shore which encroached upon the frothing water, and the dark figure showed sharply against it. The figure vanished, reappeared, and sank from sight again. When this had happened several times Gillow remarked: "Perhaps we had better go over. The man's clean gone mad."

"No, sir!" objected Mattawa Tom. "No more mad than you. See what he's after? No! You don't remember, either, how mighty hard it was to wedge in the holdfasts for the chain guys stiffening the front of the dam, or how the keys work loose? There wouldn't be much of the boring machines or dam framing left if the chains pulled those wedges out. Catch on to the idee?"

Gillow gasped. The huge timber framing, which held back the river so that the costly boring machines could work upon the reef, cumbering part of its bed, had been built only with the greatest difficulty, and when finished Thurston had found it necessary to strengthen it by heavy chains made fast in the rock above. The sockets to which these were secured had been wedged into deep-sunk holes, but more than once some of the hard wood keys had worked loose, and Gillow could guess what would happen if many were partially set free at the same time.

"If he hammered three or four of those wedges clear it would only need a bang on another one to give the river

its way," Gillow said excitedly. "Then it would take Thurston six months to fix up the damage, if he ever did, and nobody would know how it happened. The cold-blooded brute's in the maintenance gang?"

"Just so. A blame smart man, too!" asserted Mattawa Tom. "I guess the boss wouldn't want everybody to know. Rustle back your hardest and bring him along."

Fifteen minutes later Thurston took his place behind the boulder, and, because the light was clearer now, he could dimly see the man swinging a heavy hammer, against the rock. He knew that the miscreant, whose business was to prevent the possibility of such accidents, need only start a few more keys, which he would probably do when the dam was clear of men, and many thousand dollars' worth of property and the result of months of labor would be swallowed by the river. His face paled with fierce anger when he recognized this fact.

"I want that man," he declared with shut teeth. "I want him so badly that I'd forfeit five hundred dollars sooner than miss him. Slip forward, Gillow, as much out of sight as you can, and hide yourself on the other side of the ladder. Mattawa and I will wait for him here, and among us three we ought to make sure of him."

Gillow, who stole forward stooping, swore softly as he fell over many obstacles on the way. The man they wanted became visible, ascending another ladder across the river. Then, hanging in the suspended trolley, he moved, a black shape clear against the snow—along the wire which stretched high across the gulf. While the others watched him, his progress grew slower on reaching the hollow, where the cable bent slightly under the weight at its center. Suddenly the car's progress was checked altogether, and it began to move in the opposite direction more rapidly than before, while Thurston sprang to his feet.

"Slack the setting up tackles, Gillow. Hurry for your

life," he shouted. "He'll cast the cable loose and be off by the Indian trail into the ranges, if he once gets across."

Gillow ran his best, where running of any kind was barely possible even by daylight. He knew that his master was slow to forgive those whose carelessness thwarted any plan, and that, while taking the easier way over instead of crawling round a ledge, he had probably alarmed the fugitive. He reached the foot of the ladder. Climbing up in a desperate hurry, he cast loose the end of the tackle by means of which the cable was set up taut, but neglected in his haste to take a turn with the hemp rope about a post, which would have eased him of most of the strain.

"Got him safe!" cried Tom from Mattawa, scrambling to the top of the boulder, as the curve of the wire rope high above their heads increased. In spite of the fugitive's efforts, the trolley from which he was suspended ran back to the slackest part of the loop that sagged down nearer the river. Thurston, who watched him, nodded with a sense of savage satisfaction. He did not for a moment believe that, of his own initiative, any workman would have made a long journey or would have run considerable personal risk to do him an injury. That was why he was so anxious to secure the offender.

The curve grew rapidly deeper, until the rope stretched into two diagonals between its fastenings on either shore. Then the trolley descended with a run towards the river, and Geoffrey ran forward, shouting, "The weight's too much for Gillow. Bring along the coil of line from the tool locker, Tom. Hurry, I don't want to drown the rascal."

What had happened was simple. The cook, endeavoring to take a turn of the line too late, had failed, and the hemp ran through his half-frozen fingers, chafing the skin from them. Seeing Thurston floundering in his direction over the boulders, he valiantly strove to check it, regardless of the pain until it was whipped clear of his slackening

grasp and the trolley rushed downwards towards the torrent. Thurston was abreast of it before it splashed in, and had just time to see its occupant, still clutching the rope, drawn under by the sinking wire, before he plunged recklessly into the foam.

The water was horribly cold, and the first shock left him gasping and almost paralyzed. The stream was running fast, and rebounding in white foam from great stones and uneven ledges below. But the distance was short, and Thurston was a strong swimmer, so almost before the man had risen, he was within a few yards of the struggling figure. Hardly had Geoffrey clutched the man before Mattawa Tom, who had, meantime, run down stream, whirling a coil of line, loosed it, and the folds, well directed, shot through the air towards Geoffrey, uncoiling as they came. By good fortune Thurston was able to seize the end and to pass it around them both, when —for Gillow had by this time joined his companion—the two men blundered backwards up the contracted beach, and Thurston and the fugitive were drawn shorewards together, until their feet struck bottom.

Breathless and dripping, they staggered out, and, because Geoffrey still clutched the stranger's jacket, the man said:

"Mightily obliged to you! But you can let up now there's no more swimming. I couldn't run very far, if it was worth while trying to."

"You needn't trouble to thank me," was the answer. "It wasn't because I thought the world would miss you that I went into the water; but I can't expect much sense from a half-drowned man. Do you think the rest of the boys have heard us, Tom?"

The foreman glanced towards the tents clustered in the mouth of a ravine above, and seeing no sign of life there, shook his head, whereupon Geoffrey directed:

"Take him quietly to the cook-shed, and give him

some whiskey. I've no doubt that in spite of my orders you have some. Lend him dry clothes, and bring him along to my shanty as soon as he's ready. Meantime, rouse the maintenance foreman, and, if any wedges have worked loose, let him drive them home."

"You're a nice man," commented Mattawa Tom, surveying the stranger disgustedly as the man stood with the water draining from him in the cook-shed. "Here, get into these things and keep them as a present. I wouldn't like the feel of them after they'd been on to you."

"That's all right!" was the cool answer. "I expect the game's up, and I'm quite ready to buy them of you. By the way, partner, you helped your boss to pull me out, didn't you? As I said before, I'm not great on swimming."

"I'm almost sorry I had to," said Mattawa Tom, who was a loyal partisan. "But don't call me 'partner,' or there'll be trouble."

The stranger laughed, as, after a glass of hot liquor, he arrayed himself beside the banked-up stove, and presently marched under escort towards Thurston's wood and bark winter dwelling. Mattawa Tom followed close behind him with a big ax on his shoulder.

"I might be a panther you'd corralled. How do you know I haven't a pistol in my pocket, if it was any use turning ugly?" the prisoner inquired.

"I'm quite certain about you, because your pistol is in my pocket," was the dry answer, and Tom chuckled. "You weren't quite smart enough when you slipped off your jacket."

From the door of his shanty, Thurston called them, and Mattawa, thrusting his prisoner in, proceeded to mount guard close outside until Thurston reappeared to ask angrily:

"What are you doing there?"

"I figured you might want me, sir. That man's not

to be trusted," answered Tom, and Thurston laughed as he said:

"Go back, see that the maintenance man has made a good job of the wedges, and if any of the boys should ask questions you'll tell them—nothing," Geoffrey commanded. "You don't suppose I've suddenly grown helpless, do you?"

Mattawa Tom withdrew with much reluctance, and it was long before any person knew exactly what Geoffrey and the stranger said to each other, though Gillow informed his comrade that the captured man said to him, by way of explanation before sleeping:

"Your boss is considerably too smart a man for me to bluff, and I've kind of decided to help him. Shouldn't wonder if he didn't beat my last one, who would have seen me roasted before he'd have gone into a river for me. I'm not fond of being left out in the rain with the losing side, either, see? It's not my tip to talk too much, and I guess that's about good enough for you."

"You're going to help him!" commented Gillow, ironically. "All things considered, that's very kind of you."

Next morning Thurston, who summoned the cook and foreman before him, said: "I want you two to keep what happened last night a close secret, and while I cannot tell you much, I may say that the man who will remain in camp was, as you have no doubt guessed, only the cat's paw of several speculators, whom it wouldn't suit to see our employer, Savine, successful."

"But mightn't he try the same game again?" asked Mattawa, and Thurston answered:

"He might, but I hardly think he will. I intend to keep him here under my own eyes until I want him. There's no particular reason why you shouldn't see that he earns his wages, Tom. Gillow, it's perhaps not wholly unfortunate you dropped him into the river."

"Kind of trump ace up your sleeve!" suggested Mattawa, and his master answered with a smile:

"Not exactly. The other side is quite smart enough to know who holds the aces; but I fancy the complete disappearance of this few-spot card will puzzle them. Now, forget all about it. I wouldn't have said so much, but that I know I can trust you two!"

CHAPTER XV

A GREAT UNDERTAKING

EXCEPT for the wail of a wet breeze from the Pacific and the moaning of the pines outside, there was unusual quietness in the wood-built villa looking down upon the valley of the Hundred Springs on the night that the American specialist came up to consult with Savine's doctor from Vancouver. The master of High Maples had been brought home unconscious, some days earlier, and had lain for hours apparently on the point of death. During this time it was Thurston who took control of the panic-stricken household. It was he who telegraphed Thomas Savine to bring his wife. He had sent for the famous American physician and had allayed Helen's fears. When the girl's aunt arrived he had prevented that lady from undertaking the cure of the patient by her own prescription. Geoffrey's temper was never very patient, but he held it well in hand for Helen's sake.

On the night in question, Geoffrey anxiously awaited the physician's verdict. He was in the library with Thomas Savine, and had made spasmodic attempts to divert the attention of the kindly, gray-haired gentleman from the illness of his brother. At last, when the tension grew almost unbearable, Thomas Savine said:

"They cannot be much longer, and we'll hear their verdict soon. I'm trying to hope for the best, Thurston, knowing it can't be good all the time. This has been a blow to me. You see we were a one-man family, and it was Julius who started off all the rest of us. He must have been mighty sick of us several times after he married, but he never showed a sign of impatience. What a man he was—tireless, indefatigable, nothing too big for him—

until his wife died. Then all the grit seemed to melt right out of him, and during the last few years I knew, what mighty few people besides yourself know now, that Julius was just a shadow of what he had been. He held all the wires in his own hands too long, and, as he hadn't an understudy with the grit to act by himself, I was glad when he took hold of you."

"He has always been a generous and considerate employer," interposed Geoffrey. "But I had better leave you. I hear the doctors coming."

Savine laid a detaining grasp upon his arm with the words: "I want you right here. It's your concern as well as mine."

The two doctors entered, and the one from Vancouver said:

"I will let my colleague express his opinion, and may say that our patient admitted to him a complicating weakness which I had suspected. I wish we had better news to give you, but while it was your brother's wish that Mr. Thurston should know, I should almost prefer first to communicate with his own family."

"You can both speak right out; only be quick about it," Thomas Savine told him.

"It is tolerably simple, and while I sympathize with you, I must not disguise the truth," said the keen-eyed, lean-faced American. "Though Mr. Savine will partly recover from this attack, his career as an active man is closed. His heart may hold out a few years longer, if you follow my instructions, or it may at any time fail him—if he worries over anything, it certainly will. In any case, he will never be strong again. Mental powers and physical vigor have been reduced to the lowest level by over-work and excessive, if intermittent, indulgence in what I may call a very devilish drug—a particular Chinese preparation of opium, not generally known even on this opium-consuming coast. Under its influence he may still be capable of spasmodic fits of energy, but while each

dose will assist towards his dissolution, I dare not—at this stage—recommend complete deprivation. I have arranged with your own adviser as to the best treatment known to modern science, but fear it cannot prove very efficacious. That's about all I can tell you in general terms, gentlemen."

"It is worse than I feared," said Thomas Savine, leaning forward in his chair, with his elbows on the table, and his chin in his hands. Before the two doctors withdrew, the Canadian said:

"He is anxious to see Mr. Thurston, and in an hour or so it could do no harm. I will rejoin you shortly, Mr. Savine."

The door closed behind them, and Thomas Savine looked straight at Thurston as he observed: "I know little about his business, but shall have to look into it for his daughter's sake. You will help me?"

"Yes," replied Geoffrey. "It seems out of place now, but I cannot honestly co-operate with you without mentioning a conditional promise your brother made to me. Perhaps you can guess it."

"I can," said Savine, stretching out his hand. "I won't say that I hadn't thought Helen might have chosen among the highest in the Dominion just because it wouldn't be true, but you'll have my good wishes if you will see my poor brother through his immediate difficulties at least. You had Mrs. Savine's approval long ago." After a pause, he added, "There is one part of Julius's trouble Helen must never know."

The two men's fingers met in a grip that was more eloquent than many protestations, and Geoffrey went out into the moaning wind and, bareheaded, paced to and fro until he was summoned to the sick man's room. The few days that had passed since he had seen his employer had set their mark upon Savine. The sick man lay in his plainly-furnished room. With bloodless lips, drawn face, and curiously-glazed eyes, he was strangely different from

his usual self, but he looked up with an attempt at his characteristic smile as Geoffrey approached. At a signal, the nurse slipped away.

"I asked them to tell you, so you might know the kind of man I am," said Savine. "You have got to exercise that partnership option one way or another right now. It is not too late to back out, and I wouldn't blame you."

"I should blame myself to my last day if I did, sir," answered Geoffrey, trying to hide the shock he felt, and Savine beckoned him nearer.

"It's a big thing you are going into, but you'll do it with both eyes wide open," he declared. "For the past few years Julius Savine has been a shadow, and an empty name, and his affairs are mixed considerably. Reckless contracts taken with a muddled brain and speculation to make up the losses, have, between them, resulted in chaos. I'm too sick to value what I own, and no accountant can. I ran things myself too long, and no one was fit to take hold when I slackened my grip. But there's still the business, and there's still the name, and the one man in this province I can trust them to is you. I should have let go before, but I was greedy—greedy for my daughter's sake."

"It is comprehensible." Geoffrey spoke with conviction. "So far as I can serve you, you can command me."

"I know it," was the answer. "What's more, I feel it in me that you will not lose by it. Lord, how hard it is, but there's no use whining when brought up sharp by one's own folly. But see here, Geoffrey Thurston, if Helen will take you willingly I can trust her to you; but if, when I go under, she looks beyond you, and you attempt to trade upon her gratitude or her aunt's favor, my curse will follow you. Besides, if I know Helen Savine, she will be able to repay you full measure should you win her so."

For just a moment the old flame of quick anger burned in Geoffrey's eyes. Then he responded.

"I regret you even imagine I could take an dishonorable advantage of your daughter. God forbid that I should ever bring sorrow upon Miss Savine. All I ask is a fair field and the right to help her according to her need."

"Forgive me!" returned Savine. "Of late I have grown scared about her future. I believe you, Thurston; I can't say more. I felt the more sure of you when you told me straight out about what was born in you. Lord, how I envied you! The man who can stand those devils off can do most anything. It was when my wife died they got their claws on me. I was trying to forget my troubles by doing three men's work, but you can't fool with nature, and I'd done it too long already. Anyway, when I couldn't eat or sleep, they had their opportunity. At first they made my brain work quicker, but soon after I fell in with you I knew that, unless he had a good man beside him, Savine's game was over. But I wouldn't be beaten. I was holding on for Helen's sake to leave her a fortune and a name.

"All this is getting monotonous to you but let me finish when I can." Savine waited a moment to regain his breath. "I cheated the nurse and doctor to-day, and I'll be very like a dead man to-morrow. You must go down to my offices and overhaul everything; then come right back and we'll see if we can make a deal. I'll have my proposition fixed up straight and square, but this is the gist of it. While doing your best for your own advantage, hold Julius Savine's name clean before the world, win the most possible for Helen out of the wreck, and rush through the reclamation scheme—which is the key to all."

"As you said—it's a big undertaking, but I'll do my best," began Geoffrey, but Savine checked him.

"Go down and see what you make of things. Maybe

the sight of them will choke you off. I'll take no other answer. Send Tom to me," he commanded.

It was the next day when Geoffrey had an interview with Helen, who sent for him. She was standing beside a window when he came in. She looked tall in a long somber-tinted dress which emphasized the whiteness of her full round throat and the pallor of her face. The faint, olive coloring of her skin had faded; there were shadows about her eyes. At the first glance Geoffrey's heart went out towards her. It was evident the verdict of the physicians had been a heavy shock, but he fancied that she was ready to meet the inevitable with undiminished courage. Still, her fingers were cold when, for a moment, they touched his own.

"Sit down, Geoffrey. I have a great deal to say to you, and don't know how to begin," she said. "But first I am sincerely grateful for all you have done."

"We will not mention that. Neither, I hope, need I say that Miss Savine of all people could never be indebted to me. You must know it already."

Helen thanked him with her eyes as she sank into the chair he wheeled out so that the light left her face in shadow. Geoffrey stood near the window framing and he did not look directly towards her. Helen appreciated the consideration which prompted the action and the respect implied by his attitude.

"I am going to ask a great deal of you, and remind you of a promise you once made." There was a little tremor in her voice. "You will not think it ungracious if I say there is no one else who can do what seems so necessary, and ask you if you do not consider that you owe something to my father. It is hard for me, not because I doubt you, but because——"

Geoffrey checked her with a half-raised hand. "Please don't, Miss Savine—I can understand. You find it difficult to receive, when, as yet, you have, you think, but little to give. Would that make any difference? The little—

just to know that I had helped you—would be so much to me."

Again Helen was grateful. The look of anxiety and distress returned as she went on.

"I dare spare no effort for my father's sake. He has always been kindness itself to me, and it is only now that I know how much I love him. Hitherto I have taken life too easily, forgetting that sorrow and tragedy could overtake me. I have heard the physician's verdict, and know my father cannot be spared very long to me. I also know how his mind is set upon the completion of his last great scheme. That is why, and because of your promise, I have dared ask help of—you."

"Will it make it easier if I say that, quite apart from his daughter's wishes, I am bound in honor to protect the interests of Julius Savine so far as I can?" interposed Geoffrey. "Your father found me much as you did, a struggling adventurer, and with unusual kindness helped me on the way to prosperity. All I have I owe to him, and perhaps, the more so because we have cunning enemies, my own mind is bent on the completion of the scheme. I believe that we shall triumph, Miss Savine, and I use the word advisedly, still expecting much from your father's skill."

Helen gravely shook her head. "I recognize your kind intentions, but you must expect nothing. It is a hard thing for me to say, but the truth is always best, and again it is no small favor I ask from you,—to do the work for the credit of another's name—taking his task upon your shoulders, to make a broken man's last days easier. I want you to sign the new partnership agreement, and am glad you recognize that my father was a good friend to you."

The girl's courage nearly deserted her, for Helen was young still, and had been severely tried. While Geoffrey, who felt that he would give his life for the right to comfort her, could only discreetly turn his face away.

"I will do it all, Miss Savine," he said gravely. "I had already determined on as much, but you must try to believe that the future is not so hopeless as it looks. You will consider that I have given you a solemn pledge."

"Then I can only say God speed you, for my thanks would be inadequate," Helen's voice trembled as she spoke. "But I must also ask your forgiveness for my presumption in judging you that day. I now know how far I was mistaken."

Geoffrey knew to what she referred. The day had been a memorable one for him, and, with pulses throbbing, he moved forward a pace, his eyes fixed upon the speaker's face. For a moment, forgetting everything, his resolutions were flung to the winds, and he trembled with passion and hope. Then he remembered his promise to the sick man, and Helen's own warning, and recovered a partial mastery of himself. It was a mere sense of justice which prompted the girl's words, his reason warned him, but he felt, instinctively, that they implied more than this, though he did not know how much. He stood irresolute until Helen looked up, and, if it had ever existed, the time for speech was past.

"I fear I have kept you too long, but there is still a question I must ask. You have seen my father in many of his moods, and there is something in the state of limp apathy he occasionally falls into which puzzles me. I cannot help thinking there is another danger of which I do not know. Can you not enlighten me?"

Helen leaned forward, a strange fear stamped upon her face. Fresh from the previous struggle, Geoffrey, whose heart yearned to comfort her, felt his powers of resistance strained to the utmost. Still, it was a question that he could not answer. Remembering Savine's injunction—to hold her father's name clean—he said quickly: "There is nothing I can tell you. You must remember only that the physician admitted a cheering possibility."

"I will try to believe in it." The trouble deepened in

Helen's face, while her voice expressed bitter disappointment. "You have been very kind and I must not tax you too heavily."

Geoffrey turned away, distressed, for her and inwardly anathematized his evil fortune in being asked that particular question. He had, he felt, faltered when almost within sight of victory, neglecting to press home an advantage which might have won success. "It is, perhaps, the first time I have willfully thrown away my chances—the man who wins is the one who sees nothing but the prize," he told himself. "But I could not have taken advantage of her anxiety for her father and gratitude to me, while, if I had, and won, there would be always between us the knowledge that I had not played the game fairly."

Thomas Savine came into the room. "I was looking for you, and want to know when you'll go down to Vancouver with me to puzzle through everything before finally deciding just what you're going to do," he said. They talked a few moments. After the older man left him, Geoffrey found himself confronted by Mrs. Savine.

"I have been worried about you," she asserted. "You're carrying too heavy a load, and it's wearing you thin. You look a very sick man to-day, and ought to remember that the main way to preserve one's health is to take life easily."

"I have no doubt of it, madam," Thurston fidgeted, fearing what might follow; "but, unfortunately, one cannot always do so."

Mrs. Savine held out a little phial as she explained: "A simple restorative is the next best thing, and you will find yourself braced in mind and body by a few doses of this. It is what I desired to fix up my poor brother-in-law with when you prevented me."

"Then the least I can do is to take it myself," said Geoffrey, smiling to hide his uneasiness. "I presume you do not wish me to swallow it immediately?"

Mrs. Savine beamed upon him. "You might hold out an hour or two longer, but delays are dangerous," she warned him. "Kindness! Well, there's a tolerable reason why we should be good to you, and, for I guess you're not a clever man all round, Geoffrey Thurston, you have piled up a considerable obligation in your favor in one direction."

"May I ask you to speak more plainly, Mrs. Savine?" Geoffrey requested and she answered:

"You may, but I can't do it. Still, what you did, because you thought it the fair thing, won't be lost to you. Now, don't ask any more fool questions, but go right away, take ten drops of the elixir, and don't worry. It will all come right some day."

The speaker's meaning was discernible, and Geoffrey, having a higher opinion than many people of Mrs. Savine's sagacity, went out into the sunlight, satisfied. He held up the phial and was about to hurl it among the firs, but, either grateful for the donor's words, or softened by what he had heard and seen, he actually drank a little of it instead. Then came a revulsion from the strain of the last few days, and he burst into a laugh.

"It would have been mean, and I dare say I haven't absorbed sufficient of the stuff to quite poison me," he said.

CHAPTER XVI

MILLICENT TURNS TRAITRESS

It was with a heavy sense of responsibility that Geoffrey returned from a visit to Savine's offices in Vancouver, and yet there was satisfaction mingled with his anxiety. Thomas Savine, who knew little of engineering, was no fool at finance, and the week they spent together made the situation comparatively plain. It was fraught with peril and would have daunted many a man, but the very uncertainty and prospect of a struggle which would tax every energy appealed to Thurston. He felt also that here was an opportunity of proving his devotion to Helen in the way he could do it best.

"I'm uncommonly thankful we didn't send for an accountant; the fewer folks who handle those books the better," declared Thomas Savine. "I was prepared for a surprise, Thurston, but never expected this. I suppose things can be straightened out, but when I'd fixed up that balance, it just took my breath away. More than half the assets are unmarketable stock and ventures no man could value, while whether they will ever realize anything goodness only knows. It's mighty certain Julius doesn't know himself what he has been doing the last two years. I can let my partners run our business down in Oregon and stay right here for a time, counting on you to do the outside work, if what you have seen hasn't choked you off. You haven't signed the agreement yet. How does the whole thing strike you?"

"As chaos that can and must be reduced to order," answered Geoffrey with a reckless laugh. "I intend to sign the agreement, and, foreseeing that you may have trouble about the money which I propose to spend freely, I am adding all my private savings to the working capital.

It is, therefore, neck or nothing with me now, as I fear it is with the rest of you, and, in my opinion, we should let everything but the reclamation scheme go. It will either ruin us or pay us five-fold if we can put it through."

"Just so!" and Savine nodded. "I leave that end to you, but I've got to explain things to Helen, and I don't like the thought of it. My niece has talents. As her future lies at stake, she has a right to know, but it will be another shock to her. Poor Julius brought her up in luxury, and I expect has been far too mixed of late to know that he was tottering towards the verge of bankruptcy. A smart outside accountant would have soon scented trouble, but I don't quite blame my brother's cashier, who is a clerk and nothing more, for taking everything at it's book value."

That afternoon Helen sat with the two men in the library at High Maples. A roll of papers was on the table before her. When Thomas Savine had made the condition of things as plain as possible, she leaned back in her chair with crossed hands for a time.

"I thank you for telling me so much, and I can grasp the main issues," she said at length. "If my opinion is of value I would say I agree with you that the bold course is best. But you will need much money, and as it is evident money will not be plentiful, so I must do my part in helping you. Because this establishment and our mode of life here is expensive, while it will please my father to be near the scene of operations, we will let High Maples and retire to a mountain ranch. I fear we have maintained a style circumstances hardly justified too long."

"It's a sensible plan all through. I must tell you Mr. Thurston has——" began Savine, and ceased abruptly, when Geoffrey, who frowned at him, broke in:

"We have troubled Miss Savine with sufficient details, and I fancy the arrangement suggested would help to keep her father tranquil, especially as our progress will be slow. Spring is near, and, in spite of our efforts, we shall

not be able to deepen the pass in the cañon before the waters rise. That means we can do nothing there until next winter, and must continue the dyking all summer. It is very brave of you, Miss Savine."

Helen smiled upon him as she answered:

"The compliment is doubtful. Did you suppose I could do nothing? But we must march out with banners flying, or, more prosaically, paragraphs in the papers, stating that Julius Savine will settle near the scene of his most important operations. While you are here you should show yourself in public as much as possible, Mr. Thurston. Whenever I can help you, you must tell me, and I shall demand a strict account of your stewardship from both of you."

The two men went away satisfied. Savine said:

"I guess some folks are mighty stupid when they consider that only the ugly women are clever. There's my niece—well, nobody could call her plain, and you can see how she's taking hold instead of weakening. Some women never show the grit that's in them until they're fighting for their children; but you can look out for trouble, Thurston, if you fool away any chances, while Helen Savine's behind you fighting for her father."

A few days later Henry Leslie, confidential secretary to the Industrial Enterprise Company, sat, with a frown upon his puffy face, in his handsome office. He wore a silk-bound frock coat, a garment not then common in Vancouver, and a floral spray from Mexico in his buttonhole; but he was evidently far from happy, and glanced with ill-concealed dismay at the irate specimen of muscular manhood standing before him. The man, who was a sturdy British agriculturalist, had forced his way in, defying the clerks specially instructed to intercept him. Leslie had first set up in business as a land agent, a calling which affords a promising field for talents of his particular description, and having taken the new arrival's money, had, by a little manipulation of the survey lines,

transferred to him mostly barren rock and giant trees instead of land for hop culture. It was a game which had been often played before, but the particular rancher was a determined man and had announced his firm intention of obtaining his money back or wreaking summary vengeance on his betrayer.

"Danged if thee hadn't more hiding holes than a rotten, but I've hunted thee from one to one, and now I've found thee I want my brass," shouted the brawny, loud-voiced Briton. Leslie answered truthfully:

"I tell you I haven't got it, even if you had any claim on me, and it's not my fault you're disappointed, if you foolishly bought land before you could understand a Canadian survey plan."

"Then thou'lt better get it," was the uncompromising answer. "Understand a plan! I've stuck to the marked one I got from thee, and there's lawyers in this country as can. It was good soil and maples I went up to see, and how the —— can anybody raise crops off the big stones thou sold me? I'm going to have my rights, and, meantime, I'm trapesing round all the bars in this city talking about thee. There's a good many already as believe me."

"Then you had better look out. Confound you!" threatened Leslie, taking a bold course in desperation. "There's a law which can stop that game in this country, and I'll set it in motion. Anyway, I can't have you making this noise in my private office. Go away before I call my clerks to throw you out."

The effort at intimidation was a distinct failure, for the aggrieved agriculturalist, who was not quite sober, laughed uproariously as he seized a heavy ruler. "That's a good yan," he roared. "Thou darsen't for thy life go near a court with me, and the first clerk who tries to put me out, danged if I don't pound half the life out of him and thee. I'm stayin' here comf'able until I get my money."

He pulled out a filthy pipe, and filled it with what, when he struck a match, turned out to be particularly vile tobacco, and Leslie, who fumed in his chair, said presently:

"You are only wasting your time and mine—and for heaven's sake take a cigar and fling that pipe away. I haven't got the money by me, and it's the former owner's business, not mine, but if you'll call round, say the day after to-morrow, I'll see what we can do."

He named the day, knowing that he would be absent then, and the stranger, heaving his heavy limbs out of an easy chair, helped himself to a handful of choice cigars before he prepared to depart, saying dubiously:

"I'll be back on Wednesday bright and early, bringing several friends as will see fair play with me. One of them will be a lawyer, and if he's no good either, look out, mister, for I'll find another way of settling thee!"

There are in Canada, as well as other British Colonies, capitalists, dealing in lands and financing mines, whose efforts make for the progress of civilization and the good of the community. There are also others, described by their victims as a curse to any country. Representatives of both descriptions were interested in the Industrial Enterprise. Therefore, the unfortunate secretary groaned when one of the latter class, who passed his visitor in the doorway, came in smiling in a curious manner. Leslie, who hoped he had not heard much, was rudely undeceived.

"I'm hardly surprised at certain words I heard in the corridor," he commenced. "Your English friend was telling an interesting tale about you to all the loungers in the Rideau bar to-day. They seemed to believe him—he told it very creditably. When are you going to stop it, Leslie?"

"When I can pay him the equivalent of five hundred sterling in blackmail. I am afraid it will be a long time," answered the secretary, ruefully.

"Then I would advise you to beg, borrow or steal the

money. A man of your abilities and practical experience oughtn't to find much difficulty in this part of the world," said the newcomer. "The tale may have been a fabrication, but it sounded true, and while I don't set up as a reformer I am a director of this Company, and can't have those rumors set going about its secretary. No, I don't want to hear your side of the case—it's probably highly creditable to you—but I know all about the kind of business you were running, and a good many other folks in this province do, too."

"Who, in the name of perdition, would lend me the money? And it takes every cent I've got to live up to my post. You don't pay too liberally," sneered the unfortunate man, stung into brief fury by the reference to his character.

"I will," was the answer. "That is to say, I'll fix things up with the plain-spoken Britisher, and take your acknowledgment in return for his written statement that he has no claim on you. I know how to handle that breed of cattle, and mayn't press you for the money until you can pay it comfortably."

"What are you doing it for?" asked Leslie, dubiously.

"For several reasons; I don't mind mentioning a few. I want more say in the running of this Company, and I could get at useful facts my colleagues didn't know through its secretary. I could also give him instructions without the authority of a board meeting, see? And I fancy I could put a spoke in Savine's wheel best by doing it quietly my own way. One live man can often get through more than a squabbling dozen, and the money is really nothing much to me."

"I had better sue the Englishman for defamation, and prove my innocence, even if the legal expenses ruin me," said Leslie, and the other, who laughed aloud, checked him.

"Pshaw! It is really useless trying that tone with me, especially as I have heard about another dispute of the

kind you once had at Westminster. You're between the devil and the deep sea, but if you don't start kicking you'll get no hurt from me. Call it a deal—and, to change the subject, where's the man you sent up to worry Thurston?"

"I don't know," said Leslie. "I gave him a round sum, part of it out of my own pocket, for I couldn't in the meantime think of a suitable entry—all the directors don't agree with you. I know he started, but he has never come back again."

"Then you have got to find him," was the dry answer. "We'll have law-suits and land commissions before we're through, and if Thurston has corralled or bought that man over, and plays him at the right moment, it would certainly cost you your salary."

"I can't find him; I've tried," asserted Leslie.

"Then you had better try again and keep right on trying. Get at Thurston through his friends if you can't do it any other way. Your wife is already a figure in local society."

That night Leslie leaned against the mantelpiece in his quarters talking to his wife. They had just returned from some entertainment and Millicent, in beautiful evening dress, lay in a lounge chair watching him keenly.

"You would not like to be poor again, Millicent?" he said, fixing his glance, not upon her face but on her jeweled hands, and the woman smiled somewhat bitterly as she answered:

"Poor again! That would seem to infer that we are prosperous now. Do you know how much I owe half the stores in this city, Harry?"

"I don't want to!" said Leslie, with a gesture of impatience. "Your tastes were always extravagant, and I mean the kind of poverty which is always refused credit."

"My tastes!" and Millicent's tone was indignant. "I suppose I am fond of money, or the things that it can buy, and you may remember you once promised me plenty.

But why can't you be honest and own that the display we make is part of your programme? I have grown tired of this scheming and endeavoring to thrust ourselves upon people who don't want us, and if you will be content to stay at home and progress slowly, Harry, I will gladly do my share to help you."

Millicent Leslie was ambitious, but the woman who endeavors to assist an impecunious husband's schemes by becoming a social influence usually suffers, even if successful, in the process, and Millicent had not been particularly successful. She was also subject to morbid fits of reflection, accompanied by the framing of good resolutions, which, for the moment at least, she meant to keep. It is possible that night might have marked a turning-point in her career had her husband listened to her, but before she could continue, his thin lips curled as he said:

"Isn't it a little too late for either of us to practice the somewhat monotonous domestic virtues? You need not be afraid of hurting my feelings, Millicent, by veiling your meaning. But, in the first place, at the time you transferred your affections to me I had the money, and, in the second, I must either carry out what you call my programme or go down with a crash shortly. If luck favors me the prize I am striving for is, however, worth winning, but things are going most confoundedly badly just now. In fact, I shall be driven into a corner unless you can help me."

Mrs. Leslie possessed no exalted code of honor, but, in her present frame of mind, her husband's words excited fear and suspicion, and she asked sharply, "What is it you want me to do?"

"I will try to explain. You know something of my business. I sent up a clever rascal to—well, to pass as a workman seeking employment, and so enable us to forestall some of Savine's mechanical improvements. He took the money I gave him and started, but we have never seen

him since, and it is particularly desirable that I should know whether he tried and failed or what has become of him. If the man made his exact commission known it would cost me my place. The very people who would applaud me if successful would be the first to make a scapegoat of me otherwise."

"Your explanation is not quite lucid, but how could I get at the truth?"

"Ingratiate yourself with Miss Savine, or get that crack-brained aunt of hers to cure your neuralgia. There are also two young premium pupils, sons of leading Montreal citizens, in Mr. Savine's service, who dance attendance upon the fair Helen continually. It shouldn't be difficult to flatter them a little and set them talking."

"Do you think women are utterly foolish, or that they converse about dams and earthworks?" asked Millicent, trying to check her rising indignation.

"No, but I know a good many of you have the devil's own cunning, and there can be but few much keener than you. Women in this country know a great deal more about their lawful protectors' affairs than they generally do at home, and Miss Savine is sufficiently proud not to care whose wife you were if she took a fancy to you."

"It would be utterly useless!" Leslie looked his wife over with coolly critical approval, noting how the soft lamplight sparkled in the pale gold clusters of her hair, the beauty that still hung to her somewhat careworn face, and how the costly dress enhanced the symmetry of a finely-moulded frame.

"Then why can't you confine your efforts to the men? You are pretty and clever enough to wheedle secrets out of Thurston's self even, now you have apparently become reconciled to him."

For the first time since the revelations that followed Leslie's downfall a red brand of shame and anger flamed in Millicent's cheeks. She rose, facing the speaker with an almost breathless "How dare you? Is there no limit

to the price I must pay for my folly? Thurston was——. But how could any woman compare him with you?"

"Sit down again, Millicent," suggested Leslie with an uneasy laugh. "These heroics hardly become you—and nobody can extort a great deal in return for—nothing better than you. In any case, it's no use now debating whether one or both of us were foolish. I'm speaking no more than the painful truth when I say that if I can't get the man back into my hands I shall have to make a break without a dollar from British Columbia. Since you have offended your English friends past forgiveness, God knows what would become of you if that happened, while Thurston would marry Miss Savine and sail on to riches—confusion to him!"

Millicent was never afterwards certain why she accepted the quest from which she shrank with loathing, at first. While her husband proceeded to substantiate the truth of his statement, she was conscious of rage and shame, as well as a profound contempt for him; and, because of it, she felt an illogical desire to inflict suffering upon the man whom she now considered had too readily accepted his rejection. Naturally, she disliked Miss Savine. She was possessed by an abject fear of poverty, and so, turning a troubled face towards the man, she said:

"I don't know that I shall ever forgive you, and I feel that you will live to regret this night's work bitterly. However, as you say, it is over late for us to fear losing the self-respect we parted with long ago. Rest contented—I will try."

"That is better. We are what ill-luck or the devil made us" replied Leslie, laying his hand on his wife's white shoulder, but in spite of her recent declaration Millicent shrank from his touch.

"Your fingers burn me. Take them away. As I said, I will help you, but if there was any faint hope of happiness or better things left us, you have killed it," she declared in a decided tone.

"I should say the chance was hardly worth counting on," answered Leslie, as he withdrew to soothe himself with a brandy-and-soda. Millicent sat still in her chair, with her hands clenched hard on the arms of it, staring straight before her.

CHAPTER XVII

THE INFATUATION OF ENGLISH JIM

It was perhaps hardly wise of Geoffrey Thurston to suddenly promote English Jim from the position of camp cook to that of amanuensis. Geoffrey, however, found himself hard pressed when it became necessary to divide his time between Vancouver and the scene of practical operations, and he remembered that the man he had promoted had been Helen's *protégé*. James Gillow was a fair draughtsman, also, and, if not remarkable otherwise for mental capacity, wielded a facile pen, and Geoffrey found it a relief to turn his rapidly-increasing correspondence over to him. It was for this reason Gillow accompanied him on a business trip to Victoria.

English Jim enjoyed the visit, the more so because he found one or two acquaintances who had achieved some degree of prosperity in that fair city. He was entertained so well that on the morning of Geoffrey's return he boarded the steamer contented with himself and the world in general. He was perfectly sober, so he afterwards decided, or on board a rolling vessel he could never have succeeded in working out quantities from rough sketches Thurston gave him. But he had breakfasted with his friends, just before sailing, and the valedictory potations had increased, instead of assuaging, his thirst.

The steamer was a fast one. The day was pleasant with the first warmth of Spring, and Geoffrey sat under the lee of a deckhouse languidly enjoying a cigar and looking out across the sparkling sea. Gillow, who came up now and then for a breath of air, envied him each time he returned to pore over papers that rose and fell perplexingly on one end of the saloon table. It was hard to get his scale ex-

actly on the lines of the drawings; the sunrays that beat in through the skylights dazzled his eyes, and his sight did not become much keener after each visit to the bar. Nevertheless, few persons would have suspected English Jim of alcoholic indulgence as he jotted down weights and quantities in his pocket-book.

Meantime, Thurston began to find the view of the snow-clad Olympians grow monotonous. It is true that every pinnacle was silhouetted, a spire of unsullied whiteness, against softest azure. The peaks towered, a sight to entrance the vision—ethereally majestic above a cerulean sea—but Geoffrey had seen rather too much snow unpleasantly close at hand within the last few months. Therefore, he opened the newspaper beside him, and frowned to see certain rumors he had heard in Victoria embodied in an article on the Crown lands policy. Anyone with sufficient knowledge to read between the lines could identify the writer's instances of how gross injustice might be done the community with certain conditional grants made to Savine.

"That man has been well posted. He may have been influenced by a mistaken public spirit or quite possibly by a less praiseworthy motive; but if we have any more bad breakdowns I can foresee trouble," Geoffrey said to himself.

Then he turned his eyes towards the groups of passengers, and presently started at the sight of a lady carrying a camp chair, a book, and a bundle of wrappings along the heaving deck. It was Millicent Leslie, and there was no doubt that she had recognized him, for she had set down her burden and was waiting for his assistance. Geoffrey was at her side in a moment and presently ensconced her snugly under the lee of the deckhouse, where he waited, by no means wholly pleased at the meeting. He had spent most of the previous night with certain men interested in finance and provincial politics, and being new to the gentle art of wire-pulling had not quite recovered his serenity.

He regretted the good cigar he had thrown away, and scarcely felt equal to sustaining the semi-sentimental trend of conversation Millicent had affected whenever he met her, but she was alone, and cut off all hope of escape by saying:

"You will not desert me. One never feels solitude so much as when left to one's own resources among a crowd of strangers."

"Certainly not, if you can put up with my company; but where is your husband?" Geoffrey responded. Millicent looked up at him with a chastened expression.

"Enjoying himself. Some gentlemen, whose good-will is worth gaining, asked him to go inland for a few days' fishing, and he said it was necessary he should accept the invitation. Accordingly, I am as usual left to my own company while I make a solitary journey down the Sound. It is hardly pleasant, but I suppose all men are much the same, and we poor women must not complain."

Millicent managed to convey a great deal more than she said, and her sigh suggested that she often suffered keenly from loneliness; but while Geoffrey felt sorry for her, he was occupied by another thought just then, and did not at first answer.

"What are you puzzling over, Geoffrey?" she asked, and the man smiled as he answered:

"I was wondering if the same errand which took your husband to Victoria, was the same that sent me there."

"I cannot say." Millicent's gesture betokened weariness. "I know nothing of my husband's business, and must do him the justice to say that he seldom troubles me about it. I have little taste for details of intricate financial scheming, but practical operations, like your task among the mountains, would appeal to me. It must be both romantic and inspiring to pit one's self against the rude forces of Nature; but one grows tired of the prosaic struggle which is fought by eating one's enemies' dinners and patiently bearing the slights of lukewarm allies' wives.

However, since the fear of poverty is always before me, I try to play my part in it."

Helen Savine had erred strangely when she concluded that Geoffrey Thurston was without sympathy. Hard and painfully blunt as he could be, he was nevertheless compassionate towards women, though not always happy in expressing his feelings, and when Millicent folded her slender hands with a pathetic sigh, he was moved to sincere pity and indignation. He knew that some of the worthy Colonials' wives and daughters could be, on occasion, almost brutally frank, and that, in spite of his efforts, Leslie was not wholly popular.

"I can quite understand! It must be a trying life for you, but there are always chances for an enterprising man in this country, and you must hope that your husband will shortly raise you above the necessity of enduring uncongenial social relations."

"Please don't think I am complaining." Millicent read his sympathy in his eyes. "It was only because you looked so kind that I spoke so frankly. I fear that I have grown morbid and said too much. But one-sided confidence is hardly fair, and, to change the subject, tell me how fortune favors you."

"Where shall I begin?"

Millicent smiled, as most men would have fancied, bewitchingly.

"You need not be bashful. Tell me about your adventures in the mountains, with all the hairbreadth escapes, fantastic coloring, and romantic medley of incidents that must be crowded into the life of anyone engaged in such work as yours."

"I am afraid the romance wears thin, leaving only a monotonous, not to say sordid, reality, while details of cubic quantities would hardly interest you. Still, and remember you have brought it upon yourself, I will do my best."

Geoffrey reluctantly began an account of his experi-

ences, speaking in an indifferent manner at first, but warming to his subject, until he spoke eloquently at length. He was not a vain man, but Millicent had set the right chord vibrating when she chose the topic of his new-world experiences. He stopped at last abruptly, with an uneasy laugh.

"There! I must have tired you, but you must blame yourself," he said.

"No!" Millicent assured him. "I have rarely heard anything more interesting. It must be a very hard battle, well worth winning, but you are fortunate in one respect —having only the rock and river to contend against instead of human enemies."

"I am afraid we have both," was the incautious answer, and Millicent looked out across the white-flecked waters as she commented indifferently, "But there can be nobody but simple cattle-raisers and forest-clearers in that region, and what could your enemies gain by following you there?"

"They might interfere with my plans or thwart them. One of them nearly did so!" and Geoffrey, hesitating, glanced down at his companion just a second too late to notice the look of suspiciously-eager interest in her face, for Millicent had put on the mask again. She was a clever actress, quick to press into her service smile or sigh, where words might have been injudicious, and with feminine curiosity and love of unearthing a secret, was bent on drawing out the whole story. It did not necessarily follow that she should impart the secret to her husband, she said to herself. Geoffrey was, for the moment, off his guard, and victory seemed certain for the woman.

"How did that happen?" she asked, outwardly with languid indifference, inwardly quivering with suspense, but, as luck would have it, the steamer, entering one of the tide races which sweep those narrow waters, rolled wildly just then, and Geoffrey held her chair fast while the book fell from her knee and went sliding down the

slanted deck. Vexed and nervously anxious, Millicent bit one red lip while Thurston pursued the volume, and she could hardy conceal her chagrin when he returned with it.

"It flew open and a page or two got wet in the scuppers. Still, it will soon dry in the sun, and because I did my best, you will excuse me being a few seconds too slow to save it," Geoffrey apologized.

Millicent was willing to allow him to deceive himself as to the cause of her annoyance.

"It was a borrowed book, and I can hardly return it in this condition. It is really vexatious," she replied, wondering how to lead the conversation back to the place where it was interrupted. She might have succeeded, but fate seemed against her. A passenger, who knew them both, strolled by and nodded to Geoffrey.

"I have been looking for you, Thurston, and if Mrs. Leslie, accepting my excuses, can spare you for a few minutes, I have something important to tell you," said the man. "I wouldn't have disturbed you, but we'll be alongside Vancouver wharf very shortly."

Millicent could only bow in answer, and after an apologetic glance in her direction, Geoffrey followed the passenger.

"Mrs. Leslie's a handsome woman, though one would guess she had a temper of her own. Perhaps you didn't notice it, but she just looked daggers at you when you let that book get away," observed the companion, who smiled when Geoffrey answered:

"Presumably, you didn't take all this trouble to acquaint me with that fact?"

"No," admitted the man, with a whimsical gesture. "It was something much more interesting—about the agitation some folks are trying to whoop up against your partner."

Geoffrey found the information of so much interest that the steamer was sweeping through the pine-shrouded Narrows which forms the gateway of Vancouver's land-

locked harbor when he returned to Millicent, with English Jim following discreetly behind him.

"I am sorry that, as we are half-an-hour late, I shall barely have time to keep an important business appointment," said Thurston. "However, as the Sound boat does not sail immediately, my assistant, Mr. Gillow, will be able to look after your baggage, and secure a good berth for you. You will get hold of the purser, and see Mrs. Leslie is made comfortable in every way before you follow me, Gillow. I shall not want you for an hour or two."

Millicent smiled on the assistant, who took his place beside her, as the steamer ran alongside the wharf, and his employer hurried away. English Jim was a young, good-looking man of some education, and, since his promotion from the cook-shed, had indulged himself in a former weakness for tasteful apparel. He had also, though Thurston did not notice it, absorbed just sufficient alcoholic stimulant to render him vivacious in speech without betraying the reason for it, and Millicent, who found him considerably more amusing than Geoffrey, wondered whether, since she had failed with the one, she might not succeed with the other. English Jim no more connected her with the servant of the corporation whose interests were opposed to Savine's than he remembered the brass baggage checks in his pocket. His gratified vanity blinded him to everything besides the pleasure of being seen in his stylish companion's company.

He found a sunny corner for her beside one of the big Sound steamer's paddle casings, from which she could look across the blue waters of the forest-girt inlet, brought up a chair and some English papers, and after Millicent had chatted with him graciously, was willing to satisfy her curiosity to the utmost when she said with a smile:

"You are a confidential assistant of Mr. Thurston's? He is an old friend of mine, and knowing his energy, I dare say he works you very hard."

"Hard is scarcely an adequate term, madam," an-

swered English Jim. "Nothing can tire my respected chief, and unfortunately, he expects us all to equal him. He found me occupation—writing his letters—until 1 A. M. this morning; and, I believe, must have remained awake himself until it was almost light, making drawings which I have had the pleasure of poring over, all the way across. Don't you think, madam, that it is a mistake to work so hard, that one has never leisure for the serene contemplation which is one of the—one of the best things in life. Besides, people who do so, are also apt to deprive others of their opportunities."

"Perhaps so, though I hardly think Mr. Thurston would agree with you. For instance?" asked Millicent, finding his humor infectious, for English Jim could gather all the men in camp about him, when half in jest and half in earnest he began one of his discourses.

"These!" was the answer, and the speaker thrust his hand into his jacket pocket. "If Mr. Thurston had not been of such tireless nature, I might have found leisure to admire the beauty of this most entrancing coast scenery, instead of puzzling over weary figures in a particularly stuffy saloon."

He held up a large handful of papers as he spoke, glanced at them disdainfully, and, pointing vaguely across the inlet, continued, "Is not an hour's contemplation of such a prospect better than many days' labor?"

Millicent laughed outright, and, because, though English Jim's voice was even, and his accent crisp and clean, his fingers were not quite so steady as they might have been, one of the papers fluttered, unnoticed by either of them, to her feet.

"I feel tempted to agree with you," Millicent rejoined, wishing that she need not press on to the main point, for English Jim promised to afford the sort of entertainment which she enjoyed. "But a man of your frame of mind must find scanty opportunity for considering such questions among the mountains."

"That is so," was the rueful answer. "We commence our toil at daybreak, and too often continue until midnight. There are times when the monotony jars upon a sensitive mind, as the camp cooking does upon a sensitive palate. But our chief never expects more from us than he will do himself, and is generous in rewarding meritorious service."

"So I should suppose," commented Millicent. "Knowing this, you will all be very loyal to him?"

"Every one of us!" The loyalty of English Jim, who gracefully ignored the inference and fell into the trap, was evident enough. "Of course, we do not always approve of being tired to death, but where our chief considers it necessary, we are content to obey him. In fact, it would not make much difference if we were not," he added whimsically. "There was, however, one instance of a black sheep, or rather wolf of the contemptible coyote species in sheep's clothing, whom I played a minor part in catching. But, naturally, you will not care to hear about this?"

"I should, exceedingly. Did I not say that I am one of Mr. Thurston's oldest friends? I should very much like to hear about the disguised coyote. I presume you do not mean a real one, and are speaking figuratively?"

Gillow was flattered by the glance she cast upon him, and, remembering only that this gracious lady was one of his employer's friends, proceeded to gratify her by launching into a vivid description of what happened on the night when he dropped the prowler into the river. He had, however, sense enough to conclude with the capture of the man.

"But you have not told me the sequel," said Millicent. "Did you lynch the miscreant in accordance with the traditional customs of the West, or how did Mr. Thurston punish him? He is not a man who lightly forgives an injury."

"No," replied Gillow, rashly. "Against my advice,

though my respected employer is difficult to reason with, he kept the rascal in camp, both feeding and paying him well."

"You surprise me. I should have expected a more dramatic *finale*." Millicent's tone might have deceived a much more clever man who did not know her husband's position. "Why did he do so?"

There were, however, limits to English Jim's communicativeness, and he answered: "Mr. Thurston did not explain his motives, and it is not always wise to ask him injudicious questions."

Millicent, having learned what she desired to know, rested content with this, and chatted on other subjects until the big bell clanged, and the whistle shrieked out its warning. Then she dismissed Gillow with her thanks, and the last she saw of him he was being held back by a policeman as he struggled to scale a lofty railing while the steamer slid clear of the wharf. He waved an arm in the air shouting frantically, and through the thud of paddles she caught the disjointed sentences, "Very sorry. Forgot baggage checks—all your boxes here. Leave first steamer—sending checks by mail!"

"It is impossible for us to turn back, madam," said the purser to whom Millicent appealed. "The baggage will, no doubt, follow the day after to-morrow."

"But that gentleman has my ticket, and doesn't know my address!" protested the unfortunate passenger, and the purser answered:

"I really cannot help it, but I will telegraph to any of your friends from the first way-port we call at, madam."

When the steamer had vanished behind the stately pines shrouding the Narrows, English Jim sat down upon a timber-head and swore a little at what he called his luck, before he uneasily recounted the folded papers in his wallet.

"A pretty mess I've made of it all, and there'll be no end of trouble if Thurston hears of this," he said aloud,

so that a loafing porter heard and grinned. "I'll write a humble letter—but, confound it, I don't know where she's going to, and now here is one of those distressful tracings missing. It must have been that old sketch of Savine's, and Thurston will never want it, while nobody but a draughtsman could make head or tail of the thing. Anyway, I'll get some dinner before I decide what is best to be done."

While Gillow endeavored to enjoy his dinner, and, being an easy-going man, partially succeeded, Millicent, who had picked up a folded paper, leaned upon the steamer's rail with it open in her hand.

"This is Greek to me, but I suppose it is of value. I will keep it, and perhaps give it back to Geoffrey," she ruminated. "The game was amusing, but I feel horribly mean, and whether I shall tell Harry or not depends very much upon his behavior."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BURSTING OF THE SLUICE

One morning of early summer, Geoffrey Thurston lay neither asleep, nor wholly awake, inside his double tent. The canvas was partly drawn open, and from his camp-cot he could see a streak of golden sunlight grow broader across the valley, while rising in fantastic columns the night mists rolled away. The smell of dew-damped cedars mingled with the faint aromatic odors of wood smoke. The clamor of frothing water vibrated through the sweet cool air, for the river was swollen by melted snow. Geoffrey lay still, breathing in the glorious freshness, drowsily content. All had gone smoothly with the works, at least, during the last month or two. Each time that she rode down to camp with her father from the mountain ranch, Helen had spoken to him with unusual kindness. Savine would, when well enough, spend an hour in Geoffrey's tent. While some of the contractor's suggestions were characterized by his former genius, most betrayed a serious weakening of his mental powers, and it was apparent that he grew rapidly frailer, physically.

On this particular morning Geoffrey found something very soothing in the river's song, and, yielding to temptation, he turned his head from the growing light to indulge in another half-hour's slumber. Suddenly, a discordant note, jarring through the deep-toned harmonies, struck his ears, which were quick to distinguish between the bass roar of the cañon and the higher-pitched calling of the rapid at its entrance. What had caused it he could not tell. He dressed with greatest haste and was striding down into the camp when Mattawa Tom and Gillow came running towards him.

"Sluice number six has busted, and the water's going in over Hudson's ranch," shouted Tom. "I've started all the men there's room for heaving dirt in, but the river's going through in spite of them."

Geoffrey asked no questions, but ran at full speed through the camp, shouting orders as he went, and presently stood breathless upon a tall bank of raw red earth. On one side the green-stained river went frothing past; on the other a muddy flood spouted through a breach, and already a shallow lake was spreading fast across the cleared land, licking up long rows of potato haulm and timothy grass. Men swarmed like bees about the sloping side of the bank, hurling down earth and shingle into the aperture, but a few moments' inspection convinced Geoffrey that more heroic measures were needed and that they labored in vain. Raising his hand, he called to the men to stop work and, when the clatter of shovels ceased, he quietly surveyed the few poor fields rancher Hudson had won from the swamp. His lips were pressed tight together, and his expression showed his deep concern.

"There's only one thing to be done. Open two more sluice gates, Tom," he commanded.

"You'll drown out the whole clearing," ventured the foreman, and Geoffrey nodded.

"Exactly! Can't you see the river will tear all this part of the dyke away unless we equalize the pressure on both sides of it? Go ahead at once and get it done."

The man from Mattawa wondered at the bold order, but his master demanded swift obedience and he proceeded to execute it, while Geoffrey stood fast watching two more huge sheets of froth leap out. He knew that very shortly rancher Hudson's low-level possessions would be buried under several feet of water.

"It's done, sir, and a blamed bad job it is!" said the foreman, returning; and Geoffrey asked: "How did it happen?"

"The sluice gate wasn't strong enough, river rose a

foot yesterday, and she just busted. I was around bright and early and found her splitting. Got a line round the pieces—they're floating beneath you."

"Heave them up!" ordered Geoffrey.

He was obeyed, and for a few minutes glanced at the timber frame with a puzzled expression, then turning to Gillow, he said: "You know I condemned that mode of scarting, and the whole thing's too light. What carpenters made it?"

"It's one of Mr. Savine's gates, sir. I've got the drawing for it somewhere," was the answer, and Geoffrey frowned.

"Then you will keep that fact carefully to yourself," he replied. "It is particularly unfortunate. This is about the only gate I have not overhauled personally, but one cannot see to quite everything, and naturally the breakage takes place at that especial point."

"Very good, sir," remarked Gillow. "Things generally do happen in just that way. Here's rancher Hudson coming, and he looks tolerably angry."

The man who strode along the dyke was evidently infuriated, a fact which was hardly surprising, considering that he owned the flooded property. The workmen, who now leaned upon their shovels, waited for the meeting between him and their master in the expectation of amusement.

"What in the name of thunder do you mean by turning your infernal river loose on my ranch?" inquired the newcomer. Thurston rejoined:

"May I suggest that you try to master your temper and consider the case coolly before you ask any further questions."

"Consider it coolly!" shouted Hudson. "Coolly! when the blame water's washing out my good potatoes by the hundred bushel, and slooshing mud and shingle all over my hay. Great Columbus! I'll' make things red hot for you."

"See here!" and there were signs that Thurston was losing his temper. "What we have done was most unfortunately necessary, but, while I regret it at least as much as you do, you will not be a loser financially. As soon as the river falls, we'll run off the water, measure up the flooded land, and pay you current prices for the crop at average acre yield. As you will thus sell it without gathering or hauling to market, it's a fair offer."

Most of the forest ranchers in that region would have closed with the offer forthwith, but there were reasons why the one in question, who was, moreover, an obstinate, cantankerous man, should seize the opportunity to harass Thurston.

"It's not half good enough for me," he said. "How'm I going to make sure you won't play the same trick again, while it's tolerably certain you can't keep on paying up for damage done forever. Then when you're cleaned out where'll I be? This scheme which you'll never put through's a menace to the whole valley, and——"

"You'll be rich, I hope, by that time, but if you'll confine yourself to your legitimate grievance or come along to my tent I'll talk to you," said Geoffrey. "If, on the other hand, you cast doubt upon my financial position or predict my failure before my men, I'll take decided measures to stop you. You have my word that you will be repaid every cent's worth of damage done, and that should be enough for any reasonable person."

"It's not—not enough for me by a long way," shouted the rancher. "I'll demand a Government inspection, I'll—I'll break you."

"Will you show Mr. Hudson the quickest and safest way off this embankment, Tom," requested Geoffrey, coolly, and there was laughter mingled with growls of approval from the men, as the irate rancher, hurling threats over his shoulder, was solemnly escorted along the dyke by the stalwart foreman. He turned before descending, and shook his fist at those who watched him.

"I think you can close the sluices," said Geoffrey, when the foreman returned. "Then set all hands filling in this hole. I want you, Gillow."

"We are going to have trouble," he predicted, when English Jim stood before him in his tent. "Hudson unfortunately is either connected with our enemies, or in their clutches, and he'll try to persuade his neighbors to join him in an appeal to the authorities. Send a messenger off at once with this telegram to Vancouver, but stay—first find me the drawing of the defective gate."

English Jim spent several minutes searching before he answered: "I'm sorry I can't quite lay my hands upon it. It may be in Vancouver, and I'll write a note to the folks down there."

He did so, and when he went out shook his head ruefully. "That confounded sketch must have been the one I lost on board the steamer," he decided with a qualm of misgiving. "However, there is no use meeting trouble half-way by telling Thurston so, until I'm sure beyond a doubt."

Some time had passed, and the greater portion of Hudson's ranch still lay under water when, in consequence of representations made by its owner and some of his friends, a Government official armed with full powers to investigate held an informal court of inquiry in the big store shed, at which most of the neighboring ranchers were present. Geoffrey and Thomas Savine, who brought a lawyer with him, awaited the proceedings with some impatience.

"I have nothing to do with any claim for damages. If necessary, the sufferers can appeal to the civil courts," announced the official. "My business is to ascertain whether, as alleged, the way these operations are conducted endangers the occupied, and unappropriated Crown lands in this vicinity. I am willing to hear your opinions, gentlemen, beginning with the complainants."

Rancher Hudson was the first to speak, and he said:

"No sensible man would need much convincing that it's mighty bad for growing crops to have a full-bore flood turned loose on them. What's the use of raising hay and potatoes for the river to wash away? And it's plain that what has just happened is going to happen again. Before Savine began these dykes the river spread itself all over the lower swamp; now the walls hold it up, and each time it makes a hole in them, our property's most turned into a lake. I'm neither farming for pleasure nor running a salmon hatchery."

There was a hum of approval from the speaker's supporters, whose possessions lay near the higher end of the valley, and dissenting growls from those whose boundaries lay below. After several of the ranchers from the lower valley had spoken the official said:

"I hardly think you have cited sufficient to convince an unprejudiced person that the works are a public danger. You have certainly proved that two holdings have been temporarily flooded, but the first speaker pointed out that this was because the river was prevented from spreading all over the lower end of the valley, as it formerly did. Now a portion of the district is already under cultivation, and even the area under crop exceeds that of the damaged plots by at least five acres to one."

There was applause from the men whose possessions had been converted into dry land, and Hudson rose, red-faced and indignant, to his feet again.

"Has Savine bought up the whole province, Government and all? That's what I'm wanting to know," he rejoined indignantly. "What is it we pay taxes to keep you fellows for? To look the other way when the rich man winks, and stand by seeing nothing while he ruins poor settlers' hard-won holdings? I'm a law-abiding man, I am, but I'm going to let nobody tramp on me."

A burst of laughter filled the rear of the building when one of Hudson's supporters pulled him down by main force, and held him fast, observing, "You just sit right

there, and look wise instead of talking too much. I guess you've said enough already to mix everything up."

The official raised his hand. "I am here to ask questions and not answer them," he said. "Any more speeches resembling the last would be likely to get the inquirer into trouble. I must also remind Mr. Hudson that, after one inundation, he signed a document signifying his approval of the scheme, and I desire to ask him what has caused the change in his opinions."

Again there was laughter followed by a few derisive comments from the party favoring Thurston's cause, while one voice was audible above the rest, "Hudson's been buying horses. Some Vancouver speculator's check!"

The rancher, shaking off his follower's grasp, bounded to his feet, and glared at the men behind him. "I'll get square with some of you fellows later on," he threatened. Turning towards the officer, he went on: "Just because I'm getting tired of being washed out I've changed my mind. When he's had two crops ruined, a man begins to get uneasy about the third one—see?"

"It is a sufficient reason," answered the official. "Now, gentlemen, I gather that some of you have benefited by this scheme. If you have any information to give me, I shall be pleased to hear it."

Several men told how they had added to their holdings many acres of fertile soil, which had once been swamp, and the Crown official said:

"I am convinced that two small ranches have been temporarily inundated, and six or seven benefited. So much for that side of the question. I must now ascertain whether the work is carried out in the most efficient manner, and how many have suffered in minor ways by the contractors' willful neglect, as the petitioners allege."

Hudson and his comrades testified at length, but each in turn, after making the most of the accidental upset of a barrow-load of earth among their crops, or the blundering of a steer into a trench, harked back to the broken

sluice. When amid some laughter they concluded, others who favored Savine described the precautions Thurston had taken. Then the inquirer turned over his papers, and Thomas Savine whispered to Geoffrey: "It's all in our favor so far, but I'm anxious about that broken sluice. It's our weak point, and he's sure to tackle it."

"Yes," agreed Geoffrey, whose face was strangely set. "I am anxious about it, too. Can you suggest anything I should do, Mr. Gray?"

The Vancouver lawyer, who had a long experience in somewhat similar disputes, hitched forward his chair. "Not at present," he answered. "I think with Mr. Savine that the question of the sluice gate may be serious. Allowances are made for unpreventable accidents and force of circumstances, but a definite instance of a wholly inefficient appliance or defective workmanship might be most damaging. It is particularly unfortunate it was framed timber of insufficient strength that failed."

Geoffrey made no answer, but Thomas Savine, who glanced at him keenly, fancied he set his teeth while the lawyer, turning to the official inquirer, said:

"These gentlemen have given you all the information in their power, and if you have finished with them, I would venture to suggest that any technical details of the work concern only Mr. Thurston and yourself."

There was a protest from the assembly, and the officer beckoned for silence before he answered:

"You gentlemen seem determined between you to conduct the whole case your own way. I was about to dismiss with thanks the neighboring landholders who have assisted me to the best of their ability."

With some commotion the store-shed was emptied of all but the official, his assistant, and Thurston's party. Beckoning to Geoffrey, the official held up before his astonished eyes a plan of the defective gate. "Do you consider the timbering specified here sufficient for the

strain?" he asked. "I cannot press the question, but it would be judicious of you to answer it."

"No!" replied Geoffrey, divided between surprise and dismay.

The drawing was Savine's. He could recognize the figures upon it, but it had evidently been made when the contractor was suffering from a badly-clouded brain. The broken gate itself was damaging evidence, but this was worse, for a glance at the design showed him that the artificers who worked from it had, without orders even, slightly increased the dimensions. Any man with a knowledge of mechanical science would condemn it, but, while he had often seen Savine incapable of mental effort of late, this was the first serious blunder that he had discovered. The mistake, he knew, would be taken as evidence of sheer incapacity; if further inquiry followed, perhaps it would be published broadcast in the papers, and Geoffrey was above all things proud of his professional skill. Still, he had pledged his word to both his partner and his daughter, and there was only one course open to him, if the questions which would follow made it possible.

The lawyer, leaning forward, whispered to Thomas Savine, and then said aloud, "If that drawing is what it purports to be, it must have been purloined. May we ask accordingly how it came into your possession?"

"One of the complainants forwarded it to me. He said he—obtained—it," was the dry answer. "Under the circumstances, I hesitate to make direct use of it, but by the firm's stamp it appears genuine."

"That Mr. Savine could personally be capable of such a mistake as this is impossible on the face of it," said the inquirer's professional assistant. "It is the work of a half-trained man, and suggests two questions, Do you repudiate the plan, and, if you do not, was it made by a responsible person? I presume you have a draughtsman?"

"There is no use repudiating anything that bears our

stamp," said Geoffrey, disregarding the lawyer's frown, and looking steadily into the bewildered face of Thomas Savine. "I work out all such calculations and make the sketches myself. My assistant sometimes checks them."

The official, who had heard of the young contractor's reputation for daring skill, looked puzzled as he commented:

"From what you say the only two persons who could have made the blunder are Mr. Savine and yourself. I am advised, and agree with the suggestion, that Mr. Savine could never have done so. From what I have heard, I should have concluded it would have been equally impossible with you; but I can't help saying that the inference is plain."

"Is not all this beside the question?" interposed the lawyer. "The junior partner admits the plan was made in the firm's offices, and that should be sufficient."

Geoffrey held himself stubbornly in hand while the officer answered that he desired to ascertain if it was the work of a responsible person. He knew that this blunder would be recorded against him, and would necessitate several brilliant successes before it could be obliterated, but his resolution never faltered, and when the legal adviser, laying a hand upon his arm, whispered something softly, he shook off the lawyer's grasp.

"The only two persons responsible are Mr. Savine and myself—and you suggested the inference was plain," he asserted.

Here Gillow, who had been fidgeting nervously, opened his lips as if about to say something, but closed them again when his employer, moving one foot beneath the table, trod hard upon his toe.

"I am afraid I should hardly mend matters by saying I am sorry it is," said the official, dryly. "However, a mistake by a junior partner does not prove your firm incapable of high-class work, and I hardly think you will be troubled by further interference after my report is

made. My superiors may warn you—but I must not anticipate. It is as well you answered frankly, as, otherwise, I should have concluded you were endeavoring to make your profits at the risk of the community; but I cannot help saying that the admission may be prejudicial to you, Mr. Thurston, if you ever apply individually for a Government contract. Here is the drawing. It is your property."

Geoffrey stretched out his hand for it, but Savine was too quick for him, and when he thrust it into his pocket, the contractor, rising abruptly, stalked out of the room. Gillow, who followed and overtook him, said:

"I can't understand this at all, sir. Mr. Savine made that drawing. I know his arrows on the measurement lines, and I was just going to say so when you stopped me. I have a confession to make. I believe I dropped that paper out of my wallet on board the steamer."

"You have a very poor memory, Gillow," and Thurston stared the speaker out of countenance. "I fear your eyes deceive you at times as well. You must have lost it somewhere else. In any case, if you mention the fact to anybody else, or repeat that you recognize Mr. Savine's handiwork, I shall have to look for an assistant who does not lose the documents with which he is entrusted."

Gillow went away growling to himself, but perfectly satisfied with both his eyesight and memory. Thurston had hardly dismissed him than Thomas Savine approached, holding out the sketch.

"See here, Geoffrey," began the contractor's brother, and one glance at the speaker was sufficient for Thurston, who stopped him.

"Are you coming to torment me about that confounded thing? Give it to me at once," he said.

He snatched the drawing from Savine's hand, tore it into fragments, and stamped them into the mould. "Now that's done with at last!" he said.

"No," was the answer. "There's no saying where a

thing like this will end, if public mischief-makers get hold of it. You have your future, which means your professional reputation, to think of. In all human probability my poor brother can't last very long, and this may handicap you for years. I cannot——"

"Damn my professional reputation! Can't you believe your ears?" Geoffrey broke in.

"I'm not blind yet, and would sooner trust my eyes," was the dry answer. "Nobody shall persuade me that I don't know my own brother's figures. There are limits, Geoffrey, and neither Helen nor I would hold our peace about this."

"Listen to me!" Geoffrey's face was as hard as flint. "I see I can't bluff you as easily as the Government man, but I give you fair warning that if you attempt to make use of your suspicions I'll find means of checkmating you. Just supposing you're not mistaken, a young man with any grit in him could live down a dozen similar blunders, and, if he couldn't, what is my confounded personal credit in comparison with what your brother has done for me and my promise to Miss Savine? So far as I can accomplish it, Julius Savine shall honorably wind up a successful career, and if you either reopen the subject or tell his daughter about the drawing, there will be war between you and me. That is the last word I have to say."

"I wonder if Helen knows the grit there is in that man," pondered Savine, when, seeing all protests were useless, he turned away, divided between compunction and gratitude. Neither he nor the lawyer succeeded in finding out how the drawing fell into hostile hands, while, if Geoffrey had his suspicions, he decided that it might be better not to follow them up.

CHAPTER XIX

THE ABDUCTION OF BLACK CHRISTY

THERE were weighty reasons why Christy Black, whose comrades reversed his name and called him Black Christy instead, remained in Thurston's camp as long as he did. Although a good mechanic, he was by no means fond of manual labor, and he had discovered that profitable occupations were open to an enterprising and not over-scrupulous man. On the memorable night when Thurston fished him out of the river, his rescuer had made it plain that he must earn the liberal wages that were promised to him. As a matter of fact, Black had made the most of his opportunities, and in doing so had brought himself under the ban of the law during an altercation over a disputed mineral claim.

Black, who then called himself by another name, disappeared before an inquiry as to how the body of one of the owners of the claim came into a neighboring river. Only one comrade, and a mine-floating speculator, who stood behind the humbler disputants, knew or guessed at the events which led up the fatality. The comrade shortly afterwards vanished, too, but the richer man, who had connived at Black's disappearance, kept a close hand on him, forcing him as the price of freedom to act as cat's-paw in risky operations, until Black, tired of tyranny, had been glad to tell Thurston part of the truth and to accept his protection. The man from whose grip he hoped he had escaped was the one who had helped Leslie out of a difficulty.

Black Christy found, however, that a life of virtuous toil grew distinctly monotonous, and one morning, when Mattawa Tom's vigilance was slack, he departed in search

of diversion in the settlement of Red Pine, which lay beyond the range. He found congenial society there, and, unfortunately for himself, went on with a boon companion next morning to a larger settlement beside the railroad track. He intended to complete the orgie there, and then to return to camp. Accordingly it happened that, when afternoon was drawing towards a close, he sat under the veranda of a rickety wooden saloon, hurling drowsy encouragement at the freighter who was loading rock-boring tools into a big wagon. He wondered how far his remaining dollar would go towards assuaging a thirst which steadily increased, and two men, who leaned against the wagon, chuckled as they watched him. The hands of one of the men were busy about the brass cap which decorated the hub of the wheel, but neither Black nor the teamster noticed this fact. Black had seen one of the men before, for the two had loafed about the district, ostensibly prospecting for minerals, and had twice visited Thurston's camp.

It was a pity Black had absorbed sufficient alcohol to confuse his memory, for when the men strolled towards him he might have recognized the one whose hat was drawn well down. As it was, he greeted them affably.

"Nice weather for picnicking in the woods. Not found that galena yet? I guess somebody in the city is paying you by the week," he observed jocosely.

"That's about the size of it!" The speaker laughed. "But we've pretty well found what we wanted, and we're pulling out with the Pacific express. There don't seem very much left in your glass. Anything the matter with filling it up with me?"

"I'm not proud," was the answer. "I'm open to drink with any man who'll set them up for me." When the prospector called the bar-tender, Black proceeded to prove his willingness to be "treated."

Nothing moved in the unpaved street of the sleepy settlement, when the slow-footed oxen and lurching wagon

had lumbered away. The sun beat down upon it pitilessly, and the drowsy scent of cedars mingled with the odors of baking dust which eddied in little spirals and got into the loungers' throats. The bar-tender was liberal with his ice, however, and Black became confidential. When he had assured them of his undying friendship, one of the prospectors asked:

"What's a smart man like you muling rocks around in a river-bed for, anyway? Can't you strike nothing better down to the cities?"

"No," declared Black, thickly. "Couldn't strike a job nohow when I left them. British Columbia played out—and I had no money to take me to California."

"Well," said the prospector, winking at his comrade, "there is something we might put you on to. The first question is, what kin you do?"

According to Black's not over-coherent answer, there was little he could not do excellently. After he had enumerated his capabilities, the other man said:

"I guess that's sufficient. Come right back with us to 'Frisco and we'll have a few off days before we start you. This is no country for a live man, anyway."

Black nodded sagaciously and tried hard to think. He was afraid of Thurston, but more so of the other man connected with the Enterprise Company. In San Francisco he would be beyond the reach of either, and the city offered many delights to a person of his tastes with somebody else willing to pay expenses.

"I'll come," he promised thickly. "So long as you've got the dollars I'll go right round the earth with either of you."

"Good man!" commended the prospector. "Bring along another jugful, bar-tender."

The attendant glanced at the three men admiringly, for the speaker was plainly sober, and he knew how much money Black had paid him. He went back to his bottles, and there was nobody to see the other prospector, who had

kept himself in the background, pour something from a little phial beneath his hand, into Black's liquor.

"Not quite so good as last one. I know 'Frisco. Great time at China Joe's, you an' me," murmured Black as he collapsed with his head upon the table. He was soon snoring heavily.

"Your climate has been too much for him," one of the men declared, when the saloon-keeper came in. "Say, hadn't you better help us heave him in some place where he can sleep, unless you'd prefer to keep him as an advertisement?"

Black was stored away with some difficulty, and two hours later he was wheeled on a baggage-truck into the station, where half the inhabitants of the settlement assembled to see him off. The big cars were already clanging down the track, when a tall man riding a lathered horse appeared among the scattered pines on the shoulder of the hill above the settlement. A bystander commented:

"Thurston's foreman coming round for some of his packages. As usual he's in an almighty hurry. That place is 'most as steep as a roof, and he's coming down it at a gallop."

The prospectors glanced at each other, and one of them said, "Lend me a hand, somebody, to heave our sick partner aboard."

Black was unceremoniously deposited upon the platform of the nearest car, where he sat blinking vacantly at the assembly, while the conductor, leaning out from the door of the baggage-car, looked back towards the rider who was clattering through a dust cloud down the street, as he asked: "Anybody else besides the tired man? Is that fellow yonder coming?"

"No," answered the prospector. "He's only wanting one of those cases you've just dumped out. Likes to fancy his time's precious. I know him."

The conductor waved his hand, the big bell clanged, and the train had just rolled with a rattle over a trestle ahead,

when Mattawa Tom, grimed with thick red dust, flung himself down beside the agent's office.

"Has a dark-faced thief in a plug hat with two holes in the top of it, gone out on the cars?" he shouted, and the spectators admitted that such a person boarded the train.

"Why didn't you come in two minutes earlier, Tom?" one of them inquired. "He lit out with two strangers. Has he been stealing something?"

"He's been doing worse, and I'd have been in on time, but that I stopped ten minutes to help freighter Louis cut loose the two live oxen left him," said the foreman, breathlessly. "One wheel came off his wagon going down the Clearwater Trail, and the whole blame outfit pitched over into a ravine. There's several thousand dollars' worth of our boring machines smashed up, and Louis, who has pretty well split his head, is cussing the man who took the cotter out of his wheel hub."

The two prospectors were heartily tired of their charge by the time they passed him off as the sick employé of an American firm, at the nearest station to the Washington border. When Black showed signs of waking up he was soothed with medicated liquor, and his guardians, who several times had high words with the conductor, at last unloaded him in a station hewn out of the forests encircling Puget Sound, where they managed to hoist him into a spring wagon. Black leaned against one of the men, for he was feeling distressfully ill. His head throbbed, his vision was hazy and his throat was dry. Blinking down at the rows of wooden houses among the firs, and the tall spars of vessels behind them, he said: "This isn't 'Frisco—not half big enough. Somebody made mistake somewhere. Say! Lemme out; I'm going back to the depot."

"You're coming along with us," was the decided answer. "Sit down at once before we make you."

Black slowly doubled up a still formidable fist, and

grasping a rail, lurched to and fro unsteadily. "Lemme out 'fore I kill somebody. Claim rightsh of British citizensh," he said.

"You'll get them if you're not careful," was the threat, and the speaker jerked Black's feet from under him. "I was told to remind you if you made trouble that a sheriff on this side of the frontier had some papers describing you. There's one or two patrolmen yonder handy."

"It was an accident," temporized Black, endeavoring to pull his scattered wits together.

"Juss so!" was the answer, given with a gesture of indifference. "I was only told a name for the patrolmen, and to remind you that a man, who knows all about it, has got his eye on you."

Black leered upon him with drunken cunning, then his face grew stolid, and he said nothing further until the wagon drew up in a by-street, before a door, hung across with quaint signboards of Chinese characters. The door opened and closed behind him when his companions knocked, and Black, who recognized a curious sour smell, choked out, "Gimme long drink of ice watah!"

He drained the cool draught that was brought him, then flinging himself on a pile of matting in a corner of a dim room, sank forthwith into slumber. He had intended to pretend to sleep, but to lie awake and think. His custodians, however, had arranged things differently, and Black's wits were not working up to their usual power.

Whenever railroad extension or mining enterprise provided high wages for all strong enough to earn them and crews deserted wholesale, seamen were occasionally shipped in a very irregular fashion from the ports of the Pacific slope. At the time Black was brought into one of the seaboard cities, the purveying of drugged and kidnaped mariners had risen to be almost a recognized profession.

It accordingly happened that when the unfortunate Black first became clearly conscious of anything again, he heard the gurgle of sliding water close beside his head,

and, opening his eyes, caught sight of a smoky lamp that reeled to and fro, in very erratic fashion. Moisture dripped from the beams above him, and there was a sickly smell which seemed familiar. Black, who had been to sea before, decided that he caught the aroma of bilge water. Rows of wooden shelves tenanted by recumbent figures, became discernible, and he started with dismay to the full recognition of the fact that he was in a vessel's forecastle.

Somebody or something was pounding upon the scuttle overhead. A black gap opened above him, a rush of cold night wind swept down, followed by a gruff order:

"Turn out, watch below, and help get sail upon her. Stir round before I put a move on to you!"

Men scrambled from the wooden shelves growling as they did so. Two lost their balance on the heaving floor, went down headlong, and lay where they fell. When a man in long boots floundered down the ladder, Black sat up in his bunk.

"Now there's going to be trouble. Some blame rascals have run me off aboard a lumber ship," he said.

"Correct!" observed a man who was struggling into an oilskin jacket. "You're blame well shanghaied like the rest of us, and as the mate's a rustler, you've got to make the best of it."

"Hello! What's the matter with you? Not feeling spry this morning, or is it hot water you're waiting for?" the mate said, jerking Black out of his bunk as he spoke. "Great Columbus! What kind of a stiff do you call yourself? Up you go!"

Black went, with all the expedition he was capable of, and, blundering out through the scuttle, stood shivering on a slant of wet and slippery deck. A brief survey showed him that he was on board a full-rigged ship, timber laden, about to be cast off by a tug. There was a fresh breeze abeam. Looking forward he could see dark figures hanging from the high-pointed bowsprit that rose and dipped, and beyond them the lights of a tug reeling

athwart a strip of white-streaked sea. Mountains dimly discernible towered in the distance, and he fancied it was a little before daybreak. Bursts of spray came hurtling in through the foremast shrouds, and the whine and rattle of running wire and chain fell from the windy blackness overhead whence the banging of loosened canvas came to his ears. Glancing aloft he watched the great arches of the half-sheeted topsails swell blackly out and then collapse again with a thunderous flap. Somebody was shouting from the slanted top-gallant-yard that swung in a wide arc above them, but Black had no time for further inspection.

"Lay aloft and loose maintopsails! Are you figuring we brought you here to admire the scenery?" a hoarse voice challenged.

Half-dazed and sullenly savage Black had still sense enough to reflect that it would be little use to expect that the harassed mate would listen to reason then. Clawing his way up the ratlines he laid his chest upon the maintopsail-yard and worked his way out to the lower end of the long inclined spar. Here, still faint and dizzy, he hung with the footrope jammed against his heel, as he felt for the gasket that held the canvas to the yard. Swinging through the blackness across a space of tumbling foam he felt a horrible unsteadiness. There were other men behind him, for he could hear them swearing and coughing until a black wall of banging canvas sank beneath him when somebody roared: "Sheet her home!"

Then a hail came down across the waters from the tug. There was a loud splash beneath the bows, while shadowy figures that howled a weird ditty as they hove the hawser in, rose and fell black against the foam-flecked sea on the dripping forecastle. Nobody had missed Black, who now sat astride the yard watching the tug, as the ship, listing over further and commencing to hurl the spray in clouds about her plunging bows, gathered way. The steamboat would slide past very close alongside, and he saw a last

chance of escape. Moving out to the very yard-arm he clutched the lee-brace, which rope led diagonally downwards to the vessel's depressed rail. He looked below a moment, bracing himself for the perilous attempt.

The tug was close abreast of the ship's forecastle now, evidently waiting with engines stopped until the vessel should pass her. The crew was still heaving in the cable or loosing the top-gallants, and froth boiled almost level with the depressed rail. Black was a poor swimmer, but he could keep his head above water for a considerable time. If the tug did not start her engines within the next few seconds she must drive close down on him. Otherwise—but filled with the hope of escape and the lust for revenge Black was willing to take the risk.

He hooked one knee around the brace, gripped it between his ankles and slackened the grip of his hands. The topsails slid away from him, the spray rushed up below, his feet struck the rail, and the next moment he was down in utter blackness and conscious of a shock of icy cold water. He rose gasping and swung around, buffeted in the vessel's eddying wake. There was no shouting on board her, and, with a choking cry, he struck out for the black shape of the tug, now only a short distance away. Somebody heard and flung down a line. He clutched at it and, by good fortune, grasped it. Head downward he was drawn on board by the aid of a long boathook, and hauled, dripping, before the skipper.

"Did you fall or jump in?" asked the skipper.

"I jumped," confessed Black, putting a bold face on it, and the master of the towboat laughed.

"Shanghaied, I guess!" he said. "Well, I don't blame you for showing your grit. The master of that lumber wagon is a blame avaricious insect! He beat us down until all we got out of him will hardly pay for the coal we used—that's what he did. So if you slip ashore quietly when we tie up, he'll think you pitched over making sail, and I'll keep my mouth shut."

Accordingly it happened that next morning Black, who had left the wooden city before daylight to tramp back to the bush, sat down to consider his next move.

"There's one thing tolerably certain, Black Christy's drowned, and he'll just stop drowned until it suits him," he decided. "Next, though he's not over fond of it, there's lots of work for a good carpenter in this country and newspapers are cheap. So when it's worth his while to strike in with the Thurston Company and get even with the other side he'll probably hear of it."

He laughed a little as he once more read the message on a strip of pulpy paper somebody had slipped into his pocket.

"You are going to China for your health, and you had better stop there if you want to keep clear of trouble."

Black Christy got upon his feet again and departed into the bush, where he wandered for several weeks, building fences and splitting shingles for the ranchers in return for food and shelter, until he found work and wages at a saw-mill.

Shortly after he was employed at the mill, the director who held Leslie's receipt sat in his handsome offices with the Englishman. A newspaper lay open on the table before him, and the director smiled as he read, "Ship, *Maria Carmony,* timber laden for China, meeting continuous headwinds after sailing from this port, put into Cosechas, Cal., for shelter, and her master reported the loss of a seaman when making sail in the Straits of San Juan. The man's name was T. Slater, and must have been a stranger, as nobody appears to have known him in this city."

"Those fellows haven't managed it badly," he commented. "Anyway, there's an end of him."

"They told me they had some trouble over it, and I gave them fifty dollars extra," said Leslie. "They used

the hint you mentioned—said it worked well. But the two men are always likely to turn up, unfortunately."

"It wouldn't count," the other answered confidently. "You will have to bluff them off if they do. Deny the whole thing—nobody would believe them—it's quite easy. It would have been different with that confounded Black, for he would have had Thurston's testimony. The joke of the whole thing is, that although he knew I held evidence which would likely hang him with a jury of miners, it's tolerably certain Black never did the thing he was wanted for."

Thus, the two parties interested remained contented, and only Thurston was left bewildered and furious at the loss of a witness who might be valuable to him. Moreover, the destruction of machinery which, having been made specially for Thurston, in England, could not be replaced for months. And not once did it ever occur to his subordinate, English Jim, that he himself had furnished the clue which led to the abduction of the missing man.

CHAPTER XX

UNDER THE STANLEY PINES

It was a pleasant afternoon when Millicent Leslie stood in the portico of her villa, which looked upon the inlet from a sunny ridge just outside Vancouver. Like the other residences scattered about, the dwelling quaintly suggested a doll's house—it was so diminutively pretty with its carved veranda, bright green lattices, and spotless white paint picked out with shades of paler green and yellow. Flowers filled tiny borders, and behind the house small firs, spared by the ax, stood rigid and somber. With clear sunshine beating upon it and the blue waters sparkling close below, the tiny villa was so daintily attractive that one might almost suppose its inhabitants could carry neither care nor evil humor across its threshold, but there was disgust and weariness in Millicent's eyes as she glanced from the little pony-carriage waiting at the gate to her husband leaning against a pillar.

Leslie was evidently in a complacent frame of mind, and he did not notice his wife's expression. There was a smile upon his puffy face which suggested pride of possession. It was justifiable, for Mrs. Leslie was still a distinctly handsome woman, and she knew how to dress herself.

"You will meet very few women who excel you, and the team is unique," he remarked exultantly. "Drive around by some of the big stores and let folks see you before you turn into the park. Since that affair of Thurston's I am almost beginning to grow proud of you."

"Isn't it somewhat late in the day?" was the answer, and Millicent's tone was chilly. "If you had wished to pay me a compliment that was not intended ironically, it

would have been wiser to omit all reference to the subject you mentioned. It is done now—and heaven knows why I told you—but I can't thank you for reminding me of a deed I am ashamed of. Further, I understood the ponies were for my pleasure, and I have stooped far enough in your interest without displaying myself as an advertisement of a prosperity which does not exist."

Leslie laughed unpleasantly, noticing the flash in the speaker's eyes before he rejoined: "Perhaps it is tardy praise I give you, but regarding your last remark, to pretend you have achieved prosperity is, so far as I can see, the one way to attain it, and I have a promising scheme in view. It is not a particularly pleasant part to play, and there was a time when it appeared very improbable that either of us would be forced, as you say, to stoop to it. Neither was it my ambition which brought about the necessity. As to the ponies—I had fancied they might do their part, too, but they are a reward for services rendered in finding me a clue to the missing-man mystery. Nobody need know that they're not quite our own. Now you have got them, isn't it slightly unfair to blame me because you were willing to earn them?"

"I suppose so," admitted Millicent. "Still, I can't help remarking that you take the man's usual part of blaming the woman for whatever happens. To-day I will not drive through the city, but straight into the park."

Leslie said nothing further, but followed his wife to the gate. On his way to his office, he turned and looked after her with a frown as she rattled her team along the uneven road. She was a vain and covetous woman with a bias towards intrigue, but there had been times since her marriage when she despised herself, and as a natural consequence blamed her husband. Sometimes she hated Thurston, also, though more often she was sensible of vague regrets, and grew morbid thinking of what might have been. Now she flushed a little as she glanced at

the ponies and remembered that they were the price of treachery. The animals were innocent, but she found satisfaction in making them feel the sting of the whip.

She looked back at the city.

It rose in terraces above the broad inlet—a maze of wooden buildings, giving place to stone. Over its streets hung a wire network, raised high on lofty poles, which would have destroyed the beauty of a much fairer city. Back of the city rose the somber forest over which at intervals towered the blasted skeleton of some gigantic pine.

Millicent felt that she detested both the city, with its crude mingling of primitive simplicity and Western luxury, and the life she lived in it. It was a life of pretense and struggle, in which she suffered bitter mortifications daily. Presently she reined the team in to a walk as she drove under the cool shade of the primeval forest which, with a wisdom not common in the West, the inhabitants of Vancouver have left unspoiled as Nature. A few drives have been cut through the trees and between the long rows of giant trunks she could catch at intervals the silver shimmer of the Straits. In this park there was only restful shadow. Its silence was intensified by the soft thud of hoofs. A dim perspective of tremendous trees whose great branches interlocked, forming arches for the roof of somber green very far above, lured her on.

Millicent felt the spell of the silence and sighed remembering how the lover whom she had discarded once pleaded that she would help him in a life of healthful labor. She regretted that she had not consented to flee with him to the new country. Now she was tied to a man she despised, and who had put her, so she considered, to open shame. She could not help comparing his weak, greedy, yet venomous nature, with the other's courage, clean purpose and transparent honesty.

"I was a fool, ten times a fool; but it is too late," she told herself, and then tightening her grip on the reins she started with surprise. The man to whom her thoughts

had strayed was leaning against a hemlock with his eyes fixed on her face. It was the first time they had met since she played the part of Delilah, and, in spite of her customary self-command, Millicent betrayed her agitation. A softer mood was upon her and she had the grace to be ashamed. Still, it appeared desirable to discover whether he suspected her.

"I was quite startled to see you, Geoffrey, but I am very glad. It is almost too hot for walking. Won't you let me drive you?" she said with flurried haste.

If Geoffrey hesitated Millicent noticed no sign of it beyond that he was slow in answering. He was conscious that Mrs. Leslie looked just then a singularly attractive companion, but she was the wife of another man, and, of late, he had felt a vague alarm at the confidences she seemed inclined to exchange with him. Nevertheless, he could find no excuse at the moment which would not suggest a desire to avoid her, and with a word of thanks he took his place at her side.

"I came down to consult my friend, Mr. Thomas Savine, on business," he explained. "I had one or two other matters to attend to, and promised to overtake him and his wife during their stroll. I must have missed them. What a pretty team! Have you had the ponies long?"

Millicent's well-gloved fingers closed somewhat viciously upon the whip, for the casual question was unfortunate, but she smiled as she answered and she chatted gayly until, in an interlude, Thurston felt prompted to say:

"Coincidences are sometimes striking, are they not? You remember, the last time we met, suggesting that I was fortunate in having no enemies among the mountains?"

"Yes," she replied, shrinking a little, "I do—but do you know that it makes one shiver to talk about glaciers and snow on such a perfect day."

A man of keener perceptions, reading the speaker's face,

would have changed the subject at once, and Millicent had earned his tactful consideration. It was a good impulse which prompted her to place herself beyond the reach of further temptation. Geoffrey, however, was unobservant that afternoon.

"I am certainly tired of glaciers and snow and other unpleasant things myself, and was merely going to say that, shortly after I last talked with you, I discovered another instance of an unknown enemy's ingenuity," he went on. "A wagon we had chartered upset down a steep ravine, and several costly pieces of machinery I had brought out from England, and can hardly replace, were smashed to pieces."

"Ah!" responded Millicent, staring straight before her. "What a pity! Still accidents of that description must be fairly common where the mountain roads are bad?"

"They are; but this was not an accident. We found that somebody had pulled out the cotter or iron pin which held the wagon wheel on."

"Did any of your own men do it?" Millicent inquired, concealing her eagerness, and Thurston answered with pride in his tone:

"My own men risk their lives almost every day in my service. There is not one among them capable of treachery—now. We made tolerably certain it was the work of two strangers, who hung about the neighboring settlement and disappeared immediately after the accident."

Millicent's eyes flashed, her white teeth were set together, and, filled with hot indignation against her husband, she lashed the ponies viciously. There were several reasons for what she had done, including a dislike to Miss Savine, but perhaps the greatest was the sordid fear of poverty. Now she saw that her husband had tricked her. She had stooped to save his position and not to enable him to work further injury for Thurston. The innocent ponies were Leslie's gift, and the smart of the

lash she drew across their sleek backs appeared vicarious punishment.

"Have I displeased you?" Geoffrey asked.

"No," replied Millicent. "Displeased me! How could I resent anything you might either say or do? Have I not heaped injury upon you?"

She turned to gaze straight at him with a curious glitter in her eyes. Thurston, bewildered by it and by the traces of ill-suppressed passion in her voice, grew distinctly uneasy. He was glad that one of the ponies showed signs of growing restive under its punishment.

"Steady, Millicent! They're a handsome pair, but not far off bolting, and there's no parapet to yonder bridge," he cautioned.

In place of an answer the woman again flicked one of the beasts viciously with the whip, and, next moment, the light vehicle lurched forward with a whir of gravel hurled up by the wheels. The team had certainly shied, and the road curved sharply to the unguarded bridge over a little creek.

"This is my business," declared Geoffrey, wrenching the reins from her grasp. "Sit well back, throw the whip down and clutch the rail fast." Then he stood upright grasping the lines in his hard hands. It was, however, evident that he could not steer the ponies around the bend, and the fall to the rocks beneath the bridge might mean death.

"Hold fast for your life," he shouted, and let the team run straight on. There was a heavy shock as the light wheels struck a fallen branch on leaving the graded road. The vehicle lurched, and Millicent, whose eyes were wide with terror, screamed faintly. Geoffrey still stood upright driving the team straight ahead down a more open glade of the forest. He knew that the stems of the fern and the soft ground beneath would soon bring them to a standstill if they did not strike a tree-trunk first.

The going was heavy, and with a plunge or two, the

ponies stopped on the edge of a thicket. Geoffrey, alighting, soothed the trembling creatures with some difficulty, led them back to the road, and, taking his place again, turned towards Millicent. It appeared necessary that he should soothe her, too, for, though generally a self-possessed person, the emotions of the last few minutes had proved too much for her. She had suffered from remorse, disgust with herself, rage against her husband, and to these there had also been added the fear of sudden death.

"It ended better than it might have done," said Geoffrey, awkwardly. "Very sorry, but you must really be careful in using the whip to the ponies. Shall I get down and bring you some water, Millicent? You look faint. The fright has made you ill."

"No," Millicent denied. "I am not ill; only startled a little—and very grateful." Instinctively, she moved a little nearer him when Geoffrey handed her the reins again. He bent his head and smiled reassuringly. Millicent was white in the face, and shivered a little—she was also very pretty, and it would have been unkind not to try to comfort her. Whether it was love of power, dislike to her husband, or perhaps something more than this, even the woman was not then sure, but she took full advantage of the position, and the ponies walked undirected, while Geoffrey essayed to chase away her fears. He bent his head lower towards her, and Millicent smiled at him with apparently shy gratitude.

Lifting his eyes a moment, Geoffrey set his teeth as he met the coldly indifferent gaze of Helen, who came towards them in company with Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Savine. Millicent also saw the three Savines, and, either tempted by jealousy of the girl or by mere vanity, managed to convey a subtle expression of triumph in her smile of greeting. Possibly neither Thomas Savine nor Geoffrey would have understood the meaning of the smile had they seen it, but Helen read it, and it was with the very faintest

bend of her head that she acknowledged Thurston's salutation.

Geoffrey was silent after they had driven by, but Millicent, who seemed to recover her spirits, chatted gayly and even said flattering things of Miss Savine.

Meantime Helen felt confused, hurt and angry. It was true that she had rejected Thurston's suit, but she had found his loyalty pleasant, and had believed implicitly in his rectitude. Now a hot color rose to her temples as she remembered that it was the second time she had seen him under circumstances which suggested that he had transferred the homage offered her to a married woman. She felt the insult as keenly as if he had struck her. The Dominion had not progressed so far in one direction as the great republic to the south of it, neither are friendships or flirtations of the kind looked upon as leniently as they are in tropical colonies, and there was a good deal of the Puritan in Helen Savine.

"Well, I'm—just rattled. That's Mrs. Leslie!" remarked Thomas Savine. "Thurston goes straight and steady, but what in the name of——"

Mrs. Savine, whose one weakness was medicine, flashed a warning glance at him, and hastened to answer, perhaps for the benefit of Helen who came up just then.

"There is not a straighter man in the Dominion, and one could stake their last cent on the honor of Geoffrey Thurston," she declared. "From several things I've heard, I've settled that's just a dangerous woman."

Helen heard, and, knowing her friendship for the young engineer, guessed her aunt's motive. The explanation, in any case, would not have improved the position much, for if the woman were utterly unprincipled, which she could well believe, why should the man who had, of his own will, pledged himself to her?—but she flushed again as she refused to follow that line of thought further. Nevertheless, she clenched a little hand in a manner that boded ill for Thurston when next he sought speech with her.

Afterwards she endeavored to treat the incident with complete indifference, and succeeded in deceiving her uncle only, for in spite of her efforts, her face and carriage expressed outraged dignity. Her aunt was not in the least deceived, and her eyes twinkled now and then as she chattered on diverse topics, while the party drove leisurely towards the city.

When Leslie returned home from his office he found his wife awaiting him with the disdainful look upon her face which he had learned to hate.

"What's the matter now, Millicent? Has something upset your usually pacific temper?" he asked with a sneer.

"Yes," was the direct answer. "When you last asked my assistance you, as usual, lied to me. I helped you to trace your—your confederate, because you told me it was the only way to escape ruin. For once I believed you, which was blindly foolish of me. I met Mr. Thurston and learned from him how somebody had plotted to destroy his machinery. He did not know it was you, and I very nearly told him."

"Don't be a fool, Millicent," Leslie admonished. "I'm sick of these displays of temper—they don't become you. I tell you I plotted nothing except to get my man into my own hands again. The other rascals exceeded their orders on their own responsibility. Oh, you would wear out any poor man's patience! Folks in my position don't do such childish things as hire people to upset wagons loaded with machinery."

"I do not believe you," replied Millicent, and Leslie laughed ironically.

"I don't know that it greatly matters whether you do or not. Have you any more such dutiful things to say?"

"Just this. One hears of honor among thieves, and it is evident you cannot rise even to that. You have once more tricked me, and henceforward I warn you that you must carry on your work in your own way. Further,

if I hear of any more plotting to do Thurston injury, I shall at once inform him."

"Then," Leslie gripped her arm until his fingers left their mark on the soft white flesh, "I warn you that it will be so much the worse for you. Good heavens, why don't you—but go, and don't tempt me to say what I feel greatly tempted to."

Millicent shook off his grasp, moved slowly away, turning to fling back a bitter answer from the half-opened door.

"Confound her!" said Leslie, refilling the glass upon the table. "Now, what the devil tempted me to ruin all my prospects by marrying that woman?"

CHAPTER XXI

REPARATION

"You will have to go," said Henry Leslie, glancing sharply at his wife across the breakfast-table as he returned her an open letter which had lately arrived by the English mail. "I hardly know where to find the money for your passage out and home just now, and you will want new dresses—women always seem to. Still, we can't afford to miss an opportunity, and it may prove a good investment," he added, reflectively.

Millicent sighed as she took the letter, and, ignoring her husband's words, read it through again. It had been written by a relative, a member of the legal profession, and requested her to return at once to England. The stern old man, who had reared her, was slowly dying, and had expressed an urgent wish to see her.

"Isn't that the man who wanted you to marry Thurston, and when you disappointed him washed his hands of both of you?" Leslie inquired. "There were reasons why I hadn't the pleasure of duly making the acquaintance of your relatives, but I think you said he was tolerably wealthy, and, as he evidently desires a reconciliation, you must do your best to please him. Let me see. You might catch the next New York Cunarder or the Allan boat from Quebec."

Millicent looked up at him angrily. She was not wholly heartless, and her kinsman had not only provided for her after her parents died in financial difficulties, but in his own austere fashion he had been kind to her. Accordingly, her husband's comments jarred upon her.

"I should certainly go, even if I had to travel by Colonist car and steerage," she declared. "I should do

so if there were no hope of financial benefit, which is, after all, very uncertain, for Anthony Thurston is not the man to change his mind when he has once come to a determination. The fact that he is dying and asks for me is sufficient—though it is perhaps useless to expect you to believe it."

"We must all die some day," was the abstracted answer. "Hardly an original observation, is it? But it would be folly to let such a chance pass, and I must try to spare you. If you really feel it, I sympathize with you, and had no intention of wounding your sensibilities, but as, unfortunately, circumstances force us to consider these questions practically, you will—well, you will do your best with the old man, Millicent. To put it so, you owe a duty to me."

Leslie and his wife had by this time learned to see each other's real self, naked and stripped of all disguise, and the sight was not calculated to inspire either with superfluous delicacy. The man, however, overlooked the fact that his partner in life still clung to a last grace of sentiment, and could, on occasion, deceive herself.

"I owe you a duty! How have you discharged yours to me?" she said, reproachfully. "Do not force me to oppose you, Harry, but if you are wise, go around to the depot and find out when the steamers sail."

"Yes, my dear," Leslie acquiesced with a smile, which he did not mean to be wholly ironical. "Would it be any use for me to say that I shall miss you?"

"No," answered Millicent, though she returned his smile. "You really would not expect me to believe you. Still, if only because of the rareness of such civility, I rather like to hear you say so."

Mrs. Leslie sailed in the first Cunarder, and duly arrived at a little station in the North of England where a dogcart was waiting to drive her to Crosbie Ghyll. She had known the man, who drove it long before, and he told her, with full details, how Anthony Thurston, having

come down from an iron-working town to visit the owner of the dilapidated mansion had been wounded by a gun accident while shooting. The wound was not of itself serious, but the old man's health was failing, and he had not vitality enough to recover from the shock.

Meantime, while Millicent Leslie was driven across the bleak brown moorlands, Anthony Thurston lay in the great bare guest-chamber at Crosbie Ghyll. He had been a hard, determined man, a younger son who had made money in business, while his brothers died poor, clinging to the land, and it was with characteristic grimness that he was quietly awaiting his end. The narrow, deep-sunk window in front of him was open wide, though the evening breeze blew chilly from the fells, which rose blackly against an orange glow. Though he manifested no impatience, the sunset light beating in showed an expectant look in his eyes. A much younger man sat at a table close by and laid down the pen he held, when the other said:

"That will do, Halliday. Is there any sign of the dog-cart yet? You are sure she will come to-night?"

"There is a vehicle of some kind behind the larches, but I cannot see it clearly," was the answer. "You can rest satisfied, sir, for if Mrs. Leslie has missed the train, she will arrive early to-morrow."

"To-morrow may be too late," said the old man. "I do not feel well to-night. Yes, she will come. Millicent is like her father, and, though he ruined himself, it was not because he hadn't a keen eye for the main chance. Because I was a lonely man and because, in my struggling days her mother was kind to me, I was fond of her. You needn't be jealous, Halliday. You will have the winding up of my estate, and it won't affect your share."

There was a vein of misanthropic irony in most of what Anthony Thurston said, but the other man had the same blood in him, and answered quickly:

"My own business is flourishing, and I have tried to

serve you hitherto because of the relationship. I have no other reason, sir."

"No," assented Thurston, with something approaching a laugh. "There is no doubt you are genuine. Millicent took after her father and, in spite of it, I was fond of her. Tell me again. Did you consider her happy when you saw her in Canada?"

"As I said before, it is a delicate question, but I did not think so. Her husband struck me as a particularly poor sample, sir."

"Ah! She married the rascal suddenly out of pique, perhaps, when Geoffrey left her. I could never quite get at the truth of that story, which, of course, was framed in the conventional way, but even now, though he's nearer of kin than Millicent, I can't quite forgive Geoffrey. You saw him, you said, on your last visit to those mines."

The speaker's tone was indifferent, but his eyes showed keen interest, and Halliday answered:

"If ever the whole truth came out I don't think you would blame Geoffrey, sir. Individually, I would take his word against—well, against any woman's solemn declaration. Yes, I saw him. He was making a pretty fight single-handed against almost overwhelming natural difficulties."

"Why?" asked Anthony Thurston. "A woman out there, eh? Are you pleading his cause, Halliday? Remember, if you convince me, he may be another participant in the property."

"He did not explain all his motives to me, and nobody ever gained much by attempting to force a Thurston's confidence. If you were not my kinsman and were in better health I should feel tempted to recommend you to place your affairs in other hands. Confound the property!"

There was a curious cackle in the sick man's throat, and the flicker of a smile in his sunken eyes.

"I can believe it. You are tarred with the same brush

as Geoffrey. The obstinate fool must go out there with a couple of hundred pounds or so, when he knew he had only to humor me by marrying Millicent and wait for prosperity. And yet, in one way, I'm glad he did. He never wrote me to apologize or explain—still, that's hardly surprising either. I don't know that any of us ever troubled much about other folks' opinions or listened to advice. Here am I, who might have lived another ten years, dying, because, when an officious keeper warned me, I went the opposite way. I hear wheels, Halliday."

"It is the dogcart," Halliday announced. "Yes—I see Mrs. Leslie."

"Thank God!" said the sick man. "Bring her here as soon as she's ready. Meantime, send in the doctor. I feel worse to-night."

The light was dying fast when Millicent Leslie came softly into the great bare room, and, for Anthony Thurston had paid for overtaxing his waning strength, her heart smote her as she looked upon him. She could recognize the stamp of fast approaching death. There was an unusual gentleness in his eyes, which brightened at her approach, and with the exception of Geoffrey, whose sympathy filled her with shame, it was long since anyone had looked upon her with genuine kindliness. So it was with real sorrow she knelt beside the bed and kissed him.

"I was shocked to hear of your accident, but it was some time ago, and you are recovering," she remarked, trying to speak hopefully, but with a catch in her breath.

"I am dying," was the answer, and Millicent sobbed when the withered fingers rested on her hair.

"I wanted to see you before I went. I was fond of you, Milly, and you—you and Geoffrey angered me. It was not your fault," the somewhat strained voice added wistfully. "He—I don't wish to hurt you, or hear the stereotyped version he of course endorsed. He left you?"

Millicent Leslie was not wholly evil. She had a softer side, and, in the moment of reconciliation, dreaded to in-

flict further pain upon one to whom she owed much. If the truth was not in her, there was one thing in her favor, so at least she afterwards tried to convince herself. Prompted by a desire to soothe a dying man's last hours, she voluntarily accepted a very unpleasant part. She was thankful her head was bent as she said: "It was perhaps my fault. I would not—I could not consent to humor him in what appeared a senseless project—and so Geoffrey went to Canada."

She felt the old man's hand move caressingly across her hair. "Poor Millicent," he sympathized. "And you chose another husband. Are you happy with him out there? But stay, it is twilight and the old place is gloomy. If you would like them, ask for candles. Geoffrey—Geoffrey left you!"

Millicent did not desire candles, but gently drew herself away. Anthony Thurston's tenderness had touched her, and, with sudden compunction, she remembered that she had deceived a dying man. He believed her, but she did not wish him to see her face. She drew a chair towards the bed, and for a moment looked about her, striving to collect her scattered thoughts. Framed by the stone-ribbed window, the afterglow still shimmered, a pale luminous green, and one star twinkled over the black shoulder of Crosbie Fell. Curlews called mournfully down in the misty mosses, and when she turned her head the sick man's face showed faintly livid against the darker coverings of the bed. For a moment she felt tempted to make full confession, or at least excuses for Geoffrey, but Anthony Thurston spoke again just then and the moment was lost.

"I asked are you happy in Canada, Millicent," he repeated, and there was command as well as kindness in his tone. Anthony Thurston, mine owner and iron works director, was dying, but he had long been a ruler of stiff-necked men, and the habit of authority still remained with him. It struck Millicent that he was in many ways very like Geoffrey.

"I am not," she admitted. "I would not have told you if you had not insisted. It is the result of my own folly, and there is no use complaining."

Anthony Thurston stretched out a thin, claw-like hand and laid it on one of her own. "Tell me," he said.

"We are poor. That is, my husband's position is precarious, and it is a constant struggle to live up to it."

"Then why do you try?"

Millicent sighed as she answered:

"It is, I believe, necessary or he would lose it, while he aims at obtaining sufficient influence to win him a connection, if he resumed his former land business."

"From what I know it is a rascally business; but there is more than this. My time is very short, Millicent, but it seems such a very little while since a bright-haired girl who atoned for another's injury sat upon my knee, and for the sake of those days I can still protect you. Your husband treats you ill?"

There was a vibration in the strained voice which more strongly reminded the listener of Geoffrey's, and awoke her bitterness against the man she had married. It was so long since she had taken a living soul into her confidence, that she answered impulsively: "There is no use hiding the truth from you. He does not treat me well."

Then she related the story of her married life, and Anthony Thurston listened gravely, comprehending more than she meant to tell him, for when she had finished he commented: "You have neither been over loyal nor over wise—too quick to see the present gain, blind to the greater one behind—but it is my part to help, not blame you, and I will try to do so. It is dark now. Please ask for my draught and the candles. Then I want you to tell me about Geoffrey. You have met him in Canada."

Millicent, retiring, stood for a few minutes looking down from a narrow window in the bare stone corridor on to the moor. There was no moon, but the night was luminous, for the stars twinkled with a windy glitter that was flung

back by a neighboring tarn. The call of the curlew seemed more mournful, the crying of lapwing rose from the meadow land, and she started at a hollow hoot as an owl swept by on muffled wing. The night voices filled her with an eerie sensation—there was, she recollected, always something creepy about Crosbie Ghyll, and, for Millicent was superstitious, she shivered again at the reflection that she had cheated a dying man. But she could make partial reparation to the living at least, and when she came back with the candles there was resolve in her face.

"You asked me about Geoffrey. He has no reason to be ashamed of his record in Canada," she said. "I will tell you what I know from the beginning—and I hope I shall tell it well."

It was a relief to do so, and the story of Geoffrey's struggle and prospective triumph was a stirring one as it fell from the lips of the woman who had thrice wronged him. She guessed how her husband's employers had plotted, having gathered much from the talk of his guests, and the old man listened eagerly, until he struck the coverlet when she concluded. Grim satisfaction was stamped upon his twitching face.

"It is a brave story. I thank you, Millicent; you told it very well. Ay, the old blood tells—and I was proud of the lad. Went his own way in spite of me—he is my kinsman, what should I expect of him? Standing alone for a broken master, with cunning and wealth against him and his last dollar in the scheme! Quite in keeping with traditions, and there'll be broken crowns before they beat him down."

The dying man, who had fought perhaps as stubbornly all his life long, gasped once or twice before he added, "You must go now, Millicent. Send Halliday to me."

Millicent went out with a throbbing pulse and downcast eyes, and when the lawyer came in Thurston said: "Read over that partly completed will."

"Had you not better rest until to-morrow, sir?" was the answer. "Dr. Maltby warned you——"

"You ought to know by this time that I seldom take a warning, and to-morrow may be too late. Write, and write quickly. After payment of all bequests above, balance of real estate to yourself and Forsyth as trustees, to apply and use for the individual benefit of Millicent Leslie. If her husband lays hands upon it, I'll haunt you. You have power to nominate Geoffrey Thurston as your co-trustee. God knows what may happen, and her rascally husband may get himself shot by somebody he has swindled some day. What I wished for mightn't follow then? I'm paying you to make my will and not dictate to me. Repeat it as many times as may appear necessary to let my meaning show clearly through your legal phraseology."

"I have got it down, sir," the writer told him presently.

"Now, after deductions enumerated, all my floating investments in mines, stocks and shares to Geoffrey Thurston, to hold or sell as pleases him, unconditionally. Bequeathed in the hope that this will help him to confound his enemies."

It was written, signed and witnessed by Musker and the surgeon, then Anthony Thurston asked once more and very faintly for Millicent. He drew her down beside him and took her hand in his thin, gnarled one before he said:

"I have done my best for you, Milly—and again thank you for the story. After what Halliday said, it has helped to conquer an old bitterness, and—for my work is finished—I can die contented. I may be gone to-morrow, and my strength is spent. Good-by, Milly. God bless you!"

Millicent stooped and kissed him with a sense of shame. Before morning all power of speech or volition left Anthony Thurston, and twelve hours later he was dead.

CHAPTER XXII

A REPRIEVE

IT was with a heavy heart that Geoffrey Thurston turned over the papers Thomas Savine spread out before him in the Vancouver offices.

"I'm almost scared to do any more figuring," said Savine. "Money is going to be uncommonly tight with us, and, to make things worse, I can neither realize nor borrow. My brother's investments are way below par now, and the first sign of any weakness would raise up an opposition that would finish us. I can't stay here forever, and poor Julius is steadily getting worse instead of better. Are you still certain you can get the work done before the winter's through?"

"Yes," asserted Geoffrey. "If I can get the machinery and sufficient men—which means money. There's a moderate fortune waiting us once we can run the water out of the valley, and it's worth a desperate effort to secure it."

"We have made a good many daring moves since my brother gave me his power of attorney, and I have sunk more of my own money than my partners, who have backed me pluckily, care about. Still, I can't see how I'm going to meet your estimate, nohow."

"You have just got to do it," Geoffrey insisted. "It is the part you chose. At my end, I'll stop for nothing short of manslaughter. We simply can't afford to be beaten, and we're not going to be."

"I hope not," and Thomas Savine sighed dubiously. "Your assurance is refreshing, Geoffrey, but I own up I can't see—well, we've done enough for one day. Come round and spend the evening with me. Mrs. Savine is anxious to see you."

Geoffrey hesitated for a few seconds, and Thomas Savine smiled at something which faintly amused him. Remembering Helen's freezing look and his occupation when she last saw him, Geoffrey felt that it might not be pleasant to meet her so soon. Then, because he was a proud man, he endeavored to accept the invitation with cordiality.

"I am glad you will come," said Thomas Savine, with a trace of the dry humor which occasionally characterized him.

Geoffrey, who felt that in this instance the pleasure was hardly mutual, and that Helen might not share it with her uncle, said nothing further on that subject, until Mrs. Savine met him in the hotel corridor. A friendship had grown up between them since the day Geoffrey endured the elixir, after mending the bicycle, and there was a mischievous amusement in the lady's eyes as she said: "My compliments, Geoffrey. You are a brave man."

"I don't deserve them, madam. Wherein lies the bravery? Being at present in perfect health, I have no cause to fear you."

Mrs. Savine laughed good-naturedly, then laid her hand upon his arm with a friendly gesture. "Sober earnest, I am glad you came. I believe in you, Geoffrey, and like to see a man show the grit that's in him."

"I am honored," returned Geoffrey, with a little bow. There was a grateful look in his brown eyes, which did not quail in the slightest under the lady's scrutiny.

In spite of her good-will, he, however, derived little pleasure from that evening of relaxation. Helen showed no open displeasure, but he was painfully conscious that what she had seen had been a shock to her. It was impossible for him to volunteer an explanation. He was glad to retire with Savine and a cigar-box to the veranda, and trying to console himself with the reflection that he had at least shown no weakness—he took his leave early. Helen was not present when he bade Mrs. Savine farewell, but she saw him stride away over the gravel. Though she

would not ask herself why, she felt gratified that he had not stayed away.

It was some time later when, one day of early winter, he sat in his wooden shanty, which at that season replaced the tent above the cañon. Close by English Jim was busy writing, and Geoffrey, gnawing an unlighted pipe, glanced alternately through the open door at his hurrying workmen and at the letter from Thomas Savine which he held in his hand.

The letter expressed a fear that a financial crisis was imminent. "Tell him he must settle all local bills up to the minute," said Thurston, throwing it across to his amanuensis. "I daresay the English makers will wait a little for payment due on machinery. Did you find that the amount I mentioned would cover the wages through the winter?"

"Only just," was the answer. "That is, unless you could cut some of them a little."

"Not a cent," Geoffrey replied. "The poor devils who risk their lives daily fully earn their money."

"Do you know their wages equal the figure the strikers demanded and you refused to pay? Summers told me about that dispute, sir," ventured English Jim.

"The strikers were not prepared to earn higher pay—and that one word, 'demanded,' makes a big difference. Hello! who is the stranger?"

Mattawa Tom was directing a horseman towards the shanty, and Geoffrey, who watched the newcomer with growing interest, found something familiar in his face and figure, until he rose up in astonishment when the man rode nearer.

"Halliday, by all that's wonderful!" he cried. "Uncommonly glad to see you; but whatever brought you back to this far-off land again?"

"Several things," was the answer, as Halliday, shaking the snow from his furs, dismounted stiffly. "Strain of overwork necessitated a change, my doctor told me. Trust

estate I'm winding up comprised doubtful British Columbian mining interests, and last, but not least, to see you, Geoffrey."

The man's fur coat was open now, and Geoffrey, who glanced at the black coat beneath it, said:

"I'm glad you wanted to see me, anyway, but come in. Here, Jake, take the horse to the stable. Are my sympathies needed, Halliday—any of my new friends over yonder dead?"

Halliday stared at him blankly. "Haven't you read the letter I sent you? Do you get no English papers?" he questioned.

"No, to both. I fancy very few people over yonder trouble themselves as to whether I'm living. How did you address your letter?"

"Orchard City, or was it Orchardville? Mrs. Leslie told me the name of the postoffice, and I looked it up on a map."

Geoffrey thrust his guest into a chair.

"That explains it. This is Orchard Valley; the other place is away across the province, a forlorn hamlet, and some ox-driving postmaster has no doubt returned your letter. Do you bring bad news? Don't keep me in suspense."

"Anthony Thurston's dead. Died in your old place, partly the result of a gun accident," answered Halliday, and Geoffrey sat silent for a moment.

"I'm sorry—yes, sincerely," he said at last. "I can say it freely, because, as I daresay you know, I disappointed him, and can in no way benefit by his death. In fact, he had the power to refuse me what was morally my right, and no doubt he exercised it. Still, now it's too late, I feel ashamed that I never tried to patch up the quarrel. Poor old Anthony!"

Halliday smiled. "You are a better fellow than you often lead folks to suppose, Geoffrey—and I quite believe you. Such regrets are, however, generally useless, are they

not? In this case especially so, for Anthony Thurston forgot the quarrel before he died, and sent you his very good wishes. I see I have a surprise in store. You are a beneficiary. He has bequeathed you considerably more than your moral share in the property."

Thurston strode up and down the shanty before he halted.

"I'm glad that, though perhaps I deserved it, he didn't carry the bitterness into the grave with him," he declared with earnestness. "We were too much like each other to get on well, but there was a time when he was a good friend to me. It's no use pretending I'm not pleased at what you tell me—it means a great deal to me. But you must be tired and hungry, and I want to talk by the hour to you."

Halliday did full justice to the meal which the camp cook produced, and afterwards the two men sat talking until the short winter afternoon had drawn to a close and the first stars were blinking down on untrodden snows. Answering a question Halliday said:

"Your share—I'll show you a complete list when I unpack my things—will, if left invested, provide you with a moderate income for a single man. Indeed, with your Spartan tastes, you might live in what you would consider luxury. As usual, however, in such cases, the securities are not readily marketable, and your interest in some ventures could hardly be summarily realized at any sacrifice. The whole is left to you unconditionally, but my advice is decidedly that you hold on."

"I am sorry," Geoffrey replied, "because even at a sacrifice I intend to sell. If you're not too tired to listen a little longer, I'll try to explain why."

Halliday listened gravely. Then he commented:

"As Anthony Thurston said, it is characteristic of you, and it's possible that he would have approved of what on the surface looks like folly. He stated that he hoped the bequest would help you to confound your enemies. But

you must act as a business man. You say that, if you go deeper, your firm might still wind up just solvent; then why not abandon the apparently hopeless project, and withdraw? Follow your profession if you must work, or live upon your income. This drainage scheme looks tolerably desperate on your own showing, and if, selling at a sacrifice you sink all your new possessions in it, you may be left utterly cleaned out, a beggar. You have no other relatives likely to leave you another competence, Geoffrey."

"It can't be helped—or rather I don't want to help it. I've pledged my word and honor to see this undertaking through, and I mean to redeem it if it ruins me. Now what were you telling me about Mrs. Leslie?"

Halliday explained for some minutes before he said:

"You are on the spot, and it's your duty to join us. Anthony Thurston was always eccentric, and has left us a very troublesome charge. Her husband is not to get at the money, and this discrimination between man and wife is going to be confoundedly awkward. However, as I'm going to stay some little time, and if possible shoot a mountain sheep, we can discuss it at leisure."

Thomas Savine, who came up in a day or two, speedily became good friends with Halliday. Geoffrey had his work to superintend, and was suspicious that Halliday seized the opportunity his absence afforded to explain what appeared to him a sacrifice of Anthony Thurston's legacy. One evening when Halliday was down in the cañon watching the workmen toiling in the river, under the lurid blaze of the lucigen, Thomas Savine said:

"I'm going to talk straight, Geoffrey. Your friend told me the whole thing, and I agree with his opinion. See here, you are safe for life if you hold fast to what you have got now—and the Lord knows whether we will ever be successful in the cañon. Of course the money would help us, but it isn't sufficient to make victory dead certain, and it would be a drop in the bucket if we came down

with a bang, as we may very well do. Even considering what's at stake, I couldn't let you make the plunge without protesting."

"If I had ten times as much, or ten times as little, it would all go after the rest," replied Geoffrey. "I appreciate your good intentions, but you can't, and never will, convince me, so there's no use talking. You will, in the meantime, say not a word to Miss Savine on the subject."

Next morning Geoffrey said to his guest:

"I want you to write out a telegram to your partner in England. Yonder's a mounted messenger waiting for it. He's to sell everything bequeathed to me at the best price he can. You have done your best, Halliday, and I suppose I ought to be more grateful than I am, but you see I'm rather fond than otherwise of a big risk. We'll ride over with Mr. Savine and call upon my partner to-day."

It was late in the afternoon when the two arrived at the ranch which Savine had rented. It was the nearest dwelling to the camp that could be rendered comfortable, but lay some distance from it, over a very bad trail. Helen was not cordial towards Geoffrey, who left her to entertain Halliday, and slipped away to the room looking down the valley, where his partner sat with a fur robe wrapped about his bent shoulders. Savine's face had grown very hollow and his eyes were curiously dim.

"It was good of you to come, Geoffrey," he said. "How are you getting on in the cañon?"

"Famously, sir. We are certainly going to beat the river," was the prompt answer, and remembering the accession of capital, Geoffrey's cheerfulness was real. "I'm hoping to ask Miss Savine to fire the final shot some time before the snows melt."

Savine looked at him with a trace of his old keenness, and appeared satisfied that the speaker believed in his own prediction. Then he smiled as he answered:

"You do me good, Geoffrey. Good news is better than gallons of medicine, and when you make such a promise I

feel I can trust you. I'm grateful, but it's mighty trying to lie here helpless while another man plays out my last and boldest game for me. Lord! what wouldn't I give for just three months of my old vigor! Still, I'll never be fit again, and as I must lean on somebody, I'm glad it should be you."

"Lean on me! You have given me the chance of my life, sir. You don't look quite comfortable there. Let me settle that rug for you," said Geoffrey, and as with clumsy gentleness he rearranged the sick man's wrappings, Helen came unobserved into the room. She read the pity beneath the smile on the younger man's bronze face and noticed how willingly his hard fingers did their unaccustomed work. Her heart grew soft towards Geoffrey as she heard her father's sigh of content. The sight touched, though, for a reason she was ashamed of, it also troubled her. Unwilling to disturb them, she merely smiled when Thurston saw her, and found herself a seat in a corner.

"My brain's not so clear as it used to be. No use hiding things. Why," began Savine, and Geoffrey, who surmised that he had not seen his daughter, knocked over a medicine bottle with his elbow and spent some time noisily groping under the table for it. The action might have deceived one of his own sex, but Helen, who wondered what his motive was, grew piqued as well as curious.

"I've been worrying over things lately," continud Savine. "There was one of the rancher's hired men in and he told our folks a mixed story about a sluice gate bursting. You never mentioned it to me. Now I have a hazy notion that I made a drawing for a gate one day, when I was—sick, we'll say. I looked for it afterwards and couldn't find it. I've been thinking over it considerable lately."

"Then you are very foolish, sir," declared Geoffrey. "Of course, we have had one or two minor breakages, but nothing we were unable to remedy. Just now everything is going ahead in the most satisfactory manner."

Helen, who watched the speaker, decided that he was concealing something, and also fancied her father did not seem quite satisfied.

"I've been wondering whether it was that gate which burst. See here, Geoffrey, I feel you have had bad trouble; isn't it a little mean not to tell me? You will remember I'm still Julius Savine—and only a little while ago there was no man in the province who dared to try to fool me."

A measure of the speaker's former spirit revealed itself in a clearer vibration of his voice, and, raising himself in his chair, Savine became for a moment almost the man he had been.

Thurston had determined to hold his fallen leader's credit safe, not only before the eyes of others but even in his own, and was doing it to the best of his ability.

"Of course, we have had trouble—lots of it, but nothing we could not overcome," he repeated. "If everything went smoothly it would grow monotonous. Still, you can rest perfectly contented, sir, and assist us with your judgment in the difficult cases. For instance, would you let me know what you think of these specifications?"

Savine, who seemed to find a childish pleasure in being consulted, forgot his former anxiety, and Geoffrey, leaving him contented, slipped out of the ranch, and, finding a sheltered path among the redwoods, paced to and fro. He was presently surprised to see Helen move out from among the trees. She had a fur about her shoulders which set off the finely-chiselled face above it. Nevertheless, for once at least, he was by no means pleased to see her.

"I wish to ask you a question," she said. "Of course, I have heard there was an inquiry into the breaking of the sluice, but neither you nor my uncle thought fit to give me any definite information on the subject. Unfortunately, my father heard distorted rumors of the accident, and has been fretting ever since. As you know, this

is most detrimental to his failing health, and, so that I may be the better able to soothe him I want you to tell me all that happened."

"There is absolutely no cause for uneasiness. As I said, we had one or two difficulties which may have been vanquished. Your uncle will bear me out in this," answered Geoffrey, who would have spoken more freely had he not feared the girl's keenness. Helen's face, which was at first scornful, grew anxious as she responded:

"I have no doubt he would! In fact, when I asked him he explained with such readiness that I cannot help concluding you have both conspired to keep me in the dark. Can you not see that, situated as I am in caring for an invalid who will not let his mind rest, uncertainty is almost worse than the knowledge of disaster to me. Will you not tell me frankly what you fear?"

"I would do anything to drive your fears away." Geoffrey, who felt helpless beneath the listener's searching eyes, spoke with sympathy in his voice. "But I can only say again there is very slight cause for anxiety."

Helen turned half from him, angrily, then she faced round again. "You are not a good dissembler. If quick at making statements you are not prepared to substantiate them," she declared. "You would do anything to dispel my fears—but the one most necessary thing I ask. You have passed through, or are now facing, a crisis, and though some knowledge of it would be of great help to me you do not consider me worthy of your confidence."

"Heaven forbid that I should think so. There is no one more worthy—but——" Helen checked him with a gesture.

"I desire the simple truth and not indifferent compliments," she said. "You will not tell it to me, and I will plead with you no further, even for my father's sake. When will you men learn that a woman's discretion is at least equal to your own?" With a flash in her eyes, she

added: "How dare you once offer what you did to a woman you had no trust in?"

"You are almost cruel," Geoffrey answered, clenching his hand as he mastered his own anger. "Some day, perhaps, you will yet believe I tried to do what was best. Meantime, since I dare not presume to resent it, I must try to bear your displeasure patiently."

He might have said more, but that Helen left him abruptly.

"It is confoundedly hard. Once strike a certain vein of bad luck and you can neither get around nor under it, but there's no use groaning—and what on earth could I have done?" he said to the whispering firs.

He went back presently to the ranch, and found Helen, who apparently did not notice his return, chatting with Halliday. When the two men bade their host farewell, Halliday, who lingered a few minutes, observed to Thomas Savine:

"I always knew my friend was reckless, but when I spoke as I did I failed to comprehend what was at once his incentive and justification. I must thank you for your attempt to aid me, but even against the dictates of my judgment I can't help sympathizing with him now. If you don't mind my saying so—because I see you know—I think what he hopes to win is very well worth the risk."

"I certainly know, and perhaps I am prejudiced in favor of my niece, but I feel tempted to agree with you," answered Savine. "There are few better women in the Dominion, but she is wayward, and whether Geoffrey will ever win her only Heaven knows. Meantime, though we depend so much upon him, I am often ashamed to let him take his chances with us. Believe me, I have endeavored to dissuade him."

Halliday smiled. "I am a kinsman of his and know him well," he said. "It is quite in keeping with tradi-

tions that he should be perfectly willing to ruin himself for a woman, and I am at least thankful that the woman proves worthy. In this case, however, I venture to hope the end may be the achievement of prosperity. I generally speak my mind and hope I have not offended you."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ULTIMATUM

WINTER creeping down from the high peaks held the whole valley fast in its icy grip when Mrs. Thomas Savine, who was seldom daunted by the elements, went up from Vancouver to persuade her niece to seek sheltered quarters on the sunny coast until spring. Her visit was, however, in this respect a failure, for Julius Savine insisted upon remaining within touch of the reclamation works. Though seldom able to reach them, he looked eagerly forward to Geoffrey's brief visits, which alone seemed to arouse him from his lethargy.

Mrs. Savine and Helen sat in the general living-room at the ranch one day when her brother-in-law came in leaning heavily upon his partner's arm. Geoffrey had set his carpenters to build a sleigh, and from one hill shoulder bare of timber it was possible, with good glasses, to see what went on in the cañon. Savine was listening with evident satisfaction to the tall, frost-bronzed man who led him towards the room that he delighted to call his office, and Mrs. Savine, noticing it, smiled gratefully upon Geoffrey. Worn by anxious watching, Helen was possibly a little out of humor that afternoon, and the sight awoke within her a certain jealousy. She had done her best, and had done it very patiently, but she had failed to arouse her father to the animation he showed in Geoffrey's presence.

"I haven't felt so well since I saw you last," observed Savine, oblivious for the moment of his daughter. "You won't fail to come back as soon as ever you can—say the day after to-morrow?"

Geoffrey glanced towards Helen, who made no sign, and Mrs. Savine noticed that for a moment his face clouded.

Then, as he turned towards his partner, he seemed to make an effort, and his expression was confident again.

"I am afraid I cannot leave the works quite so often. Yes—we are progressing at least as well as anyone could expect," he said. "I will come and consult you whenever I can. In fact, there are several points I want your advice upon."

"Come soon," urged Savine, with a sigh. "It does me good to talk to you—after the life I've lived, this everlasting loafing comes mighty hard to me. I believe once I knew we were victorious I could let go everything and die happy."

Helen heard, and, overwrought as she was by nights of assiduous care, the speech both pained and angered her. Geoffrey's answer was not audible, as they passed on. He came back alone, off his guard for a moment, looking worn and weary, and Mrs. Savine said:

"You are tired, Geoffrey, and if you don't appear more lively next time I will attend to you. No—don't get scared. It is not physic I'm going to prescribe now. Take this lounge and just sit here where it's cosy. Talk to Helen and me until supper's ready."

Thurston had been crawling over ice-crusted rocks and wading knee-deep in water most of the preceding night. The chair stood temptingly between the two ladies and near the stove. He glanced towards it and Helen longingly. Some impulse tempted the girl to say:

"Mr. Thurston has usually so little time to spare that it would be almost too much to hope that he could devote an hour to us."

The tone was ironical, and Geoffrey, excusing himself, went out. He sighed as he floundered down the snow-cumbered trail. There was indignation in the elder lady's voice as she declared:

"I am ashamed of you, Helen. The poor man came in too late for dinner, and he must be starving. If you had just seen how he looked at you! You'd feel mean and

sorry if they found him to-morrow frozen hard in the snow."

Helen could not fancy Geoffrey overcome by such a journey because he had missed two meals, and she smiled at her aunt's dismal picture, answering her with a flippancy which increased the elder lady's indignation, "Mr. Thurston is not a cannibal, auntie."

"I can't figure why you are fooling with that man if you don't want him," said Mrs. Savine. "Oh, yes; you're going to sit here and listen to some straight talking. Isn't he good enough for you?"

Helen's face was flushed with angry color. "You speak with unpleasant frankness, but I will endeavor to answer you," she responded. "I have told Mr. Thurston—that is, I have tried to warn him that he was expecting the impossible, and what more could I do? He is my father's partner, and I cannot refuse to see him. I——"

Mrs. Savine, leaning forward, took her niece's hands in her own, saying gravely, "Are you certain it is quite impossible?"

For a moment Helen looked startled, and her eyes fell. Then, raising her head, she answered: "Have I not told you so? I have been anxious about my father lately and do not feel myself to-day. Surely you have no wish further to torment me."

"No, but I mean to finish what I have to say. Do you know all that man is doing for you? He has——" But Mrs. Savine ceased abruptly, remembering she had in return for her husband's confidence promised secrecy.

"Yes. I think I know everything," replied Helen, with something suspiciously like a sob, while her aunt broke her pledge to the extent of shaking her head with a gesture of negation. "It—it makes it worse for me. I dare not bid him go away, and I grow horribly ashamed because—because it hurts one to be conscious of so heavy a debt. Besides, he is consoling himself with Mrs. Leslie!"

"Geoffrey Thurston would be the last man to consider you owed him anything, and as to Mrs. Leslie—pshaw! It's as sure as death, Geoffrey doesn't care two bits for her. He would never let you feel that debt, my dear, but the debt is there. From what Tom has told me he has declined offer after offer, and you know that, if he carries this last scheme through, the credit and most of the money will fall to your father."

"I know." The moisture gathered in Helen's eyes. "I am grateful, very grateful—as I said, ashamed, too; but my father comes first. I tried to warn Geoffrey, but he would not take no. I feel almost frightened sometimes lest he will force me to yield against my will, but you know that would be a wrong to him—and what can I do?"

Helen, unclasping her hands from her aunt's, looked straight before her, and Mrs. Savine answered gently: "Not that. No—if you can't like him it would not be fair to him. Only try to be kind, and make quite sure it is impossible. It might have been better for poor Geoffrey if he had never mixed himself up with us. You, with all your good points, are mighty proud, my dear, but I have seen proud women find out their mistake when it was too late to set things straight. Wait, and without the help of a meddlesome old woman, it will perhaps all come right some day."

"Auntie," said Helen, looking down, some minutes later. "Though you meant it in kindness, I am almost vexed with you. I have never spoken of these things to anyone before, and though it has comforted me, you won't remind me—will you?"

"No." The older woman smiled upon the girl. "Of course not! But you are pale and worried, and I believe that there is nothing that would fix you better than a few drops of the elixir. I think I sent you a new bottle."

Then, though her eyes were misty, Helen laughed outright, as she replied:

"It was very kind of you, but I fear I lost the bottle, and have wasted too much time over my troubles. What can I tempt my father with for supper?"

When Geoffrey returned to camp, Halliday, who had arrived that day from Vancouver, had much to tell him.

"I've sold your English property, and the value lies to your credit in the B. O. M. agency. All you have to do is to draw upon your account," he said. "As you intend to sink the money in these works I can only wish you the best of good luck. Now, I'm starting for home to-morrow, and there's the other question—how to protect the interests of Mrs. Leslie. Anthony Thurston made a just will, and her share, while enough to maintain her, is not a large one, but I don't see yet just how it's to be handled. It was the testator's special wish that you should join the trustees, and that her husband should not lay his hands upon a dollar. From careful inquiries made in Vancouver, I judge he's a distinctly bad lot. Anyway, you'll have to help us in the meantime, Geoffrey, and in opening a small bank account I made your signature necessary on every check."

"It's a confoundedly unpleasant position under the circumstances. What on earth could my kinsman have been thinking of when he forced it upon me of all men?" Geoffrey responded with a rueful face. "Still, I owe him a good deal, and suppose that I must cheerfully acquiesce to his wishes."

"I cannot take upon myself to determine what the testator thought," was the dry answer. "He said the estimable Mr. Leslie might either shoot or drink himself to death some day. The late Anthony Thurston was a tenacious person, and you must draw your own conclusions."

"If there was one thing which more than another tempted me to refuse you every scrap of assistance it was the conclusion I arrived at," said Geoffrey. "However,

I'll try to keep faith with the dead man, and Heaven send me sense sufficient to steer clear of difficulties."

"I can trust your honesty any way," remarked Halliday. "There's a heavy load off my mind at last. You are a good fellow, Geoffrey, and, excuse the frankness, even in questions beyond your usual scope not so simple as you sometimes look."

A day or two before this conversation took place, Henry Leslie, sitting at his writing-table in the villa above the inlet, laid down his pen and looked up gratefully at his wife, who placed a strip of stamped paper before him. Millicent both smiled and frowned as she noticed how greedily his fingers fastened upon it.

"It is really very good of you. You don't know how much this draft means to me," he said. "I wish I needn't take it, but I am forced to. It's practically the whole of the first dole your skinflint trustee made you, isn't it?"

"It is a large share," was the answer. "Almost a year's allowance, and I'm going to pay off our most pressing debts with the rest. But I am glad to give it to you, Harry, and we must try to be better friends, and keep on the safe side after this."

"I hope we shall," replied the man, who was touched for once. "It's tolerably hard for folks like us, who must go when the devil drives, to be virtuous, but I got hold of a few mining shares, which promise to pay well now, for almost nothing; and if they turn up trumps, I'd feel greatly tempted to throw over the Company and start afresh."

He hurriedly scribbled a little note, and Millicent turned away with a smile that was not far from a sigh. She had returned from England in a repentant mood, and her husband, whose affairs had gone smoothly, was almost considerate, so that, following a reconciliation, there were times when she cherished an uncertain hope that they might struggle back to their former level. It was on one

of the occasions when their relations were not altogether inharmonious that she had promised to give him a draft to redeem the loan Director Shackleby held like a whip lash over him. Had Leslie been a bolder man, it is possible that his wife's aspirations might have been realized, for Millicent was not impervious to good influences.

Unfortunately for her, however, a free-spoken man called Shackleby, who said that he had been sent by his colleagues who managed the Industrial Enterprise Company, called upon Thurston and Savine together in their city offices. He came straight to the point after the fashion of Western business men.

"Julius Savine has rather too big a stake in the Orchard Valley for any one man," he said. "It's ancient history that if, as usual with such concerns as ours, we hadn't been a day or two too slow, we would have held the concessions instead of him. Neither need I tell you about the mineral indications in both the reefs and alluvial. Now we saw our way to rake a good many dollars out of that valley, but when Savine got in ahead we just sat tight and watched him, ready to act if he found the undertaking too big for him. It seems to me that has happened, which explains my visit to-day. We might be open to buy some of those conditional lands from you."

"They may never be ours to sell, though I hope for the contrary," Geoffrey replied.

"Exactly," said the other. "That is why we're only ready to offer you out-district virgin forest value for the portions colored blue in this plan. In other words, we speculate by advancing you money on very uncertain security."

Geoffrey laughed after a glance at the plan. "You have a pretty taste! After giving you all the best for a tithe of its future value, where do we come in?"

"On the rest," declared Shackleby, coolly. "We would pay down the money now, and advance you enough on

interest to place you beyond all risks in completing operations. Though you might get more for the land, without this assistance, you might get nothing, and it will be a pretty heavy check. I suppose I needn't say it was not until lately that we decided to meet you this way."

"By your leave!" broke in Thomas Savine, who had been scribbling figures on a scrap of paper, which he passed to Geoffrey. It bore a few lines scrawled across the foot of it: "Value absurdly low, but it might be a good way to hedge against total loss, and we could level up the average on the rest. What do you think?"

Geoffrey grasped a pen, and the paper went back with the brief answer, "That it would be a willful sacrifice of Miss Savine's future."

"Suppose we refuse?" he asked, and Shackleby stroked his mustache meditatively before he made answer:

"Don't you think that would be foolish? You see, we were not unanimous by a long way on this policy, and several of our leaders agree with me that we had better stick to our former one. It's a big scheme, and accidents will happen, however careful one may be. Then there's the risk of new conditions being imposed upon you by the authorities. Besides, you have a time limit to finish in, and mightn't do it, especially without the assistance we could in several ways render you. You can't have a great many dollars left either—see?"

"I do," said Geoffrey, with an ominous glitter in his eyes. "You needn't speak more plainly. Accidents, no doubt of the kind you refer to, have happened already. They have not, however, stopped us yet, and are not going to. I, of course, appreciate your delicate reference to your former policy; I conclude it was your policy individually. I don't like threats, even veiled ones, and nobody ever succeeded in coercing me. Accordingly, when we have drained it, we'll sell you all the land you want at its market value. You can't have an acre at anything like the price you offer now."

"That's your ultimatum. Yes? Then I'm only wasting time, and hope you won't be sorry," returned Shackleby. When he went out Geoffrey turned to Thomas Savine.

"A declared enemy is preferable to a treacherous ally," he observed dryly. "That man would never have kept faith with us."

"I don't know," was the answer. "Of course, he's crooked, but he has his qualities. Anyway, I'd sooner trust him than the invertebrate crawler, Leslie."

A day or two later Shackleby called upon Leslie in his offices and with evident surprise received the check Millicent had given to her husband.

"I wasn't in any hurry. Have some of your titled relatives in the old country left you a fortune?" he inquired ironically.

"No," was the answer. "My folks are mostly distinctly poor commoners. I, well—I have been rather fortunate lately."

"Here's your receipt," said Shackleby, with an embarrassing stare, adding when Leslie, after examining it carefully, thrust the paper into the glowing stove, "Careful man! Nobody is going to get ahead of you, but can't you see that blame paper couldn't have made a cent's worth of difference between you and me. Well, if you still value your connection with the Company, I have something to tell you. That infernal idiot Thurston won't hear of making terms, and, as you know, there's a fortune waiting if we can corral the valley."

"I can see the desirability, but not the means of accomplishing it," replied Leslie.

"No!" and the speaker glanced at him scornfully. "Well, Thurston must finish by next summer, or his conditional grants are subject to revision, while it's quite plain he can only work in the cañon in winter. Something in the accident line has got to happen."

"It failed before." Shackleby laughed.

"What's the matter with trying again, and keeping on trying? I've got influence enough to double your salary if Thurston doesn't get through. It will be tolerably easy, for this time I don't count on trusting too much to you. I'll send you along a man and you'll just make a bet with him—we'll fix the odds presently and they'll be heavy against us—that Thurston successfully completes the job in the cañon. The other man bets he doesn't. When it appears judicious we'll contrive something to draw Thurston away for a night or two."

"But if you know the man, and it's so easy, why not make the bet yourself?" Shackleby smiled pleasantly.

"Because I'm not secretary hoping to get my salary doubled and a land bonus. There are other reasons, but I don't want to hurt your feelings any more than I wish to lacerate those of my worthy colleagues. They'll ask no questions and only pass a resolution thanking you for your zealous services. Nothing is going to slip up the wrong way, but if it did you could only lose your salary, and I'd see you safe on the way to Mexico with say enough to start a store, and you would be no worse off than before, because I figure you'd lose the berth unless you chip in with me."

Leslie realized that this might well be so, but he made a last attempt. "Suppose in desperation I turned round on you?"

"I'd strike you for defamation and conspiracy, publish certain facts in your previous record, and nobody would believe you, or dare to say so. Besides, you haven't got grit enough in you by a long way, and that's why I'm taking your consent for granted. By the way, I forgot to mention that confounded Britisher raked an extra hundred dollars out of me. Said I'd got to pay for his traveling and hotel expenses. I'm not charging you, Leslie, and you ought to feel grateful to me."

CHAPTER XXIV

AN UNEXPECTED ALLY

WINTER was drawing towards its close at last, when, on the evening of a day in which the result of a heavy blasting charge had exceeded his utmost expectations, Geoffrey Thurston stood beside his foreman in his workmen's mess shanty. Tin lamps hung from the beams blackened with smoke, and sturdy men were finishing their six o'clock supper beneath them. The men were the pick of the province, for, until tempted by the contractor's high wages, most of them had been engaged in laying the foundations of its future greatness by wresting new spaces for corn and cattle from the forest. They ate, as they worked, heroically. The supper was varied and bountiful, for Geoffrey, who was conscious of a thrill of pride as he glanced down the long rows of weather-beaten faces, fed his workmen well. They had served him faithfully through howling gale and long black night, under scorching sun and bitter frost, and now that the result of that day's operations had brought the end of the work in sight, there was satisfaction in the knowledge that he had led such men.

"They're a fine crowd, Tom, and I'll be sorry to part with them," he said. "It's hard to believe, after all we have struggled with, that less than three weeks will see us through, but I'd give many dollars for every hour we can reduce the time by. Send for a keg of the hardest cider and I'll tell them so."

There was applause when the keg was lifted to the table with its head knocked in. Geoffrey, who had filled a tin dipper, said: "Here's my best thanks for the way you have backed me, boys. Since they carried the railroad across Beaver Creek, few men in the province have

grappled as you have with a task like this; but it's sometimes just possible to go a little better than what looks like one's best, and I'm asking as a favor from all of you that you will redouble your efforts. I estimate that we'll finish this tough section in eighteen days from now, but I want the work done in less time, and accordingly I'll promise a bonus to every man if we can fire the last big shot a fortnight from to-day."

"Stan' by!" shouted a big section foreman, as he hove himself upright. "Fill every can up an' wait until I've finished. Now, Mr. Thurston, I'm talking for the rest. You've paid us good wages, an' we've earned them, every cent, though that wasn't much to our credit, for Tom from Mattawa saw we did. Still, even dollars won't buy everything, and what you can't pay us for we're ready to give. If flesh an' blood can do it, a fortnight will see us through, an' the next contract you take, if it's to wipe out the coast range or run off the Pacific, we're coming along with you. I've nailed you to the bargain, boys, an' here's—The Boss, victorious, an' to —— with his bonus!"

The long shanty rang to the roar that followed, and, when it died away, Geoffrey, who set down his can, turned to his foreman.

"Who is the little man next to Walla Jake?" he asked.

"An old partner of his from Oregon. Came in one day when you were away, and, as Jake allowed he was a square man, I took him on. Found him worth his money, and fancied I'd told you."

"You did not," said Geoffrey. "Jake's quite trustworthy, but watch the stranger well. No doubt he's honest, but I'm getting nervous now we're so near the end."

The foreman answered reassuringly, and Geoffrey, who turned away, rode beneath the snow-sprinkled firs to Savine's ranch. It was late when he reached it, but his partner and Helen were expecting him. Savine sighed with satisfaction when Geoffrey said:

"In all probability we shall fire the decisive shot a fortnight from to-day."

"It is great news," replied Julius Savine. "As I have said already, it was a lucky day for me—and mine—when I first fell in with you. Two more anxious weeks and then the suspense will be over and I can contentedly close my career. Lord! it will be well worth the living for—the consummation of the most daring scheme ever carried out in the Mountain Province. I won't see your next triumph, Geoffrey, but it can hardly be greater than this you have won for me."

"You exaggerate, sir," said Geoffrey. "It was you who won the concession and overcame all the initial difficulties, while we would never have gone so far without your assistance. Such a task would have been far beyond me alone."

"No—though it is good of you to say so. There were times when I tried to fancy I was running the contract, but that was just a sick man's craze. You have played out the game well and bravely, Geoffrey, as only a true man could. Perhaps Helen will thank you—just now I don't feel quite equal to it."

Savine's voice broke a little, and he glanced at Helen, who sat very still with downcast eyes. Geoffrey also looked at her for a second, and his elation was tinged with bitterness. He could see that she was troubled, and, with a pang of sudden misgiving, he watched her anxiously. Without the one prize he had striven for, the victory would be barren to him. Still, he desired to save her embarrassment, and when she raised her head to obey her father, he broke in:

"Miss Savine can place me under an obligation by firing the fateful charge instead. It was her first commission which brought good luck to me, and it is only fitting she should complete the result of it by turning the firing key."

Helen's eyes expressed her gratitude, as, consenting,

she turned them upon the speaker. Geoffrey rising to the occasion, said:

"Did you ever hear the story of the first contract I undertook in British Columbia, sir? May I tell it to your father, Miss Savine?"

Helen was quick to appreciate his motive, and allowed him to see it. While, seizing the opportunity to change the subject, Geoffrey told the story whimsically. Humor was not his strong point, but he was capable of brilliancy just then. Julius Savine laughed heartily, and when the tale was finished all had settled down to their normal manner. When Geoffrey took his leave, however, Helen followed him to the veranda, and held out her hand. She stood close to him with the moonlight full upon her, and it was only by an effort that the man who gripped the slender fingers, conquered his desire to draw her towards him. Helen never had looked so desirable. Then he dropped her hand, and stood impassively still, waiting for what she had to say.

"I could not thank you before my father, but neither could I let you go without a word," she said, with a quiet composure which, because she must have guessed at the struggle within him, was the badge of courage. "You have won my undying gratitude, and——"

"That is a great deal, very well worth the winning," he responded. "It will be one pleasant memory to carry away with me."

"To carry with you! You are not going away?" asked Helen, with an illogical sense of dismay, which was not, however, in the least apparent. She knew that any sign of feeling would provoke the crisis from which she shrank.

"Yes," declared Geoffrey. "Once this work is completed, I shall seek another field."

"You must not!" Though her voice was strained, Helen, who dared not do otherwise, looked him steadily in the eyes. "You must not go. Now, when, if you stay

in the Province, fame and prosperity lie within your grasp you will not overwhelm me by adding to the knowledge of all I have robbed you of. It is hard for me to express myself plainly—but I dare not take this from you, too."

"Can you not guess how hard it all is for me?" He strode a few paces apart from her while the words fell from his lips. Then he halted again and turned towards her.

"I had not meant to distress you—but how can I go on seeing you so near me, hearing your voice, when every word and smile stir up a longing that at times almost maddens me? What I have done I did for you, and did it gladly, but this new command I cannot obey. Fame and prosperity! What are either worth to me when the one thing I would sell my life for is, you have told me, not to be attained?"

"I am sorry," faltered Helen, whose breath came faster. "More sorry than I can well express. I dare not ruin a bright future for you. Is there nothing I can say that will prevent you?"

"Only one thing," Geoffrey moving nearer looked down upon her until his gaze impelled Helen to lift her eyes. There was no longer any trace of passion in his face, which in spite of its firm lines had grown gentle.

"Only one thing," he repeated. "Please listen—it is necessary, even if it hurts you. I cannot blame you for my own folly, but my love is incurable. You are a dutiful daughter, with an almost exaggerated idea of justice, and I know the power circumstances give me. Still, I am so covetous that I must have all or nothing; I love you so that I dare not use the advantage chance has given me. Nevertheless, I will not despair even yet, and some day when, perhaps, absence has hidden some of my many shortcomings, I will come back and beg speech with you."

"You are very generous." The words vibrated with sincerity. "Once—always—I have cruelly wronged

you——" but here Geoffrey raised his hand and looked at the girl with a wry smile that had no mirth in it.

"You have never wronged me, Miss Savine. Once you spoke with a marvelous accuracy, and I am not generous, only so unusually wise that you must have inspired me. I cannot be content with less than the best, and what that is—again, if I am brutal you must remember I cannot help my nature—I will tell you."

He stooped, and, before she realized his intentions, deftly caught Helen's hands in each of his own, tightening his grip on them masterfully, until he forced her to look up at him. Helen trembled as she met his eyes. The man had spoken no more than the truth when he said he could not help his nature, and, suddenly transformed, it was the former Geoffrey Thurston she had shrunk from who held her fast.

"Yes, I am wise. I know I could bend you to my will now, and that afterwards you would hate me for it," he told her. "I—I would not take you so, not if you came to me. Further, for we have dropped all disguises, and face the naked truth, I have striven, and starved, and suffered for you, risked my life often—and you shall not cheat me of my due, which alone is why, because my time is not come yet, I shall go away. The one reward that will satisfy me is this, that of your own will you will once more hold my hands and say, 'I love you, Geoffrey Thurston,' and I can wait with patience—for you will come to me thus some day."

He bent his head; and Helen felt her heart leap; but it was only her fingers upon which his lips burned hot. The next moment he had gone, while leaning breathless against the balustrade she gazed after him.

Geoffrey did not glance behind him until, when some distance from the ranch, he reined his horse in, and wiped his forehead. He had yielded at last to an uncontrollable impulse which was perhaps part of his inheritance from the old moss troopers, who had carried off their brides on

the crupper. As he walked his horse, a muffled beat of hoofs came up the trail, and he fancied he heard a voice say: "The twentieth—I'll be ready."

Then a mounted figure appearing for a moment, vanished among the firs. Geoffrey, turning back to camp, noticed that beside the hollows the hoofs had made, there was the print of human feet in the powdery snow.

"There is nothing to bring any rancher down this way, and a man must have walked beside the rider," he speculated. "Who on earth could it be?" Dismissing the incident from his mind, he went on his way. It was only afterwards that the significance of the footprints became apparent.

There was a light in Geoffrey's quarters when at last he approached them, and the foreman met him at the door. "That blame waster, Black, has come back. Rode in quietly after dark, and none of the boys have set eyes on him," he said; and, noting his master's surprise, he added with a chuckle, "I put him in there for safety, and waited right here to take care of him."

Geoffrey went into the shanty, carefully closed the door, and turned somewhat sternly upon the visitor. Black's outer appearance suggested a degree of prosperity, but his face was anxious as he said, "I guess you're surprised to see me?"

"I am," was the answer. "In view of the fact that it is my duty to hand you over to the nearest magistrate, my surprise is hardly astonishing."

"No," agreed Black, "it is not. Still, I don't think you'll surrender me. Anyway, you've got to listen to a little story first. You didn't hear the whole of it last time. I figure I can trust you to do the square thing."

"Be quick, then." Geoffrey leaned against the table while his visitor began:

"You've heard of the Blue Bird mine, and how one of the men who relocated the lapsed claim was found in the river with a gash, which a rock might have made, in the back of his head? Of course you have. Well, it was me

and Rob Morgan who located the Blue Bird. Morgan was a good prospector, but the indications were hazy, and he got drunk when he could. I knew mighty little of minerals, and we done nothing with it until the time to put in our legal improvements was nearly up. Then Morgan struck rich pay ore, and we worked night and day. But we weren't quite quick enough—one night two jumpers pulled our stakes up. Oh, yes, they had the law behind them, for says the Crown, 'Unless you've developed your claim within the legal limit, it lapses; and any free miner can relocate.'"

"Come to the point," said Thurston. "I'm sleepy."

"I'm coming," Black continued; "Morgan had no grit. He got on to the whiskey, and talked about shooting himself. I swore I'd shoot the first of the other crowd who set foot on the claim instead, and half the boys who started driving pegs all round us heard me. There was a doubt as to whether the jumpers had hit the time putting their stakes in, and the boys were most for me, but as usual the thieves had a man with money behind them. His name was Shackleby."

"Ah! I begin to understand things now," said Geoffrey.

"I was sitting alone in my tent at night when one of them jumpers came in," Black went on, unheeding. "All the rest were sleeping, and the bush was very still. He'd a roll of dollar bills to give me if I'd light out quietly. Said I'd nothing to stand on, but the man behind him didn't want to figure in the papers if it went to court. Well, I wouldn't take the money, and ran him out of my tent. When he touched his pistol, I had an ax in my hand, and it was a poor man's luck that one of the boys must come along. When he'd slouched off, I began to hanker for the money, went after the jumper to see if I could raise his price, missed him and came back again, but I struck his tracks in the mud beside a creek, with another man's hoof-marks behind them. Well, next morning that jumper was found in the river with no

money in his wallet, and the boys looked black at me until I had an interview with Mr. Shackleby. He'd fixed the whole thing up good enough to hang me, and nailed me down to blame hard terms as the price of my liberty. You're getting tired—no? Shackleby got the Blue Bird, and kept his claws on me until his man, Leslie, sent me up to bust your machines; but Shackleby has worn me thin, until I'm ready to stand my trial sooner than run any more of his mean jobs for him; and now, to cut the long end off, do you believe me?"

"I think I do," replied Geoffrey. "What made you bolt from here, and what do you want from me? Is it the same promise as before?"

Black related the incidents of his abduction. He raised his right hand with a dramatic gesture as he concluded: "As I have been a liar, this is gospel truth, s'help me. Whoever killed that jumper—and I figure Shackleby knows—it wasn't me. The night you fished me out of the river I said, 'Here's a man with sand enough to stand right up to Shackleby,' and I'll make a deal with you."

"The terms?" said Geoffrey.

"Rather better than before. On your part, a smart lawyer to take my case if Shackleby sets the police on me. On mine—with you behind me, I can tell a story that will bring two Companies down on Shackleby. What brought me to the scratch now was, that I read in *The Colonist* that you'd be through shortly, and I guessed Shackleby's insect, Leslie, would have another shot at you. I'm open to take my chances of hanging to get even with them."

The mingled fear and hatred in the speaker's face was certainly genuine, and Geoffrey said briefly: "If I thought you guilty, I'd slip irons on to you. As it is, I'm willing to close that deal. You'll have to take my word and lie quiet, until you're wanted, where I hide you."

"I guess that is good enough for me," Black declared exultantly.

CHAPTER XXV

MILLICENT'S REVOLT

"I REALLY feel mean over it, and, of course, I will pay you back, but unless I get the money to meet the call, I shall have to sacrifice the stock," said Henry Leslie, glancing furtively at his wife across the breakfast-table.

Leslie was seldom at his best in the morning, but he seemed unusually nervous, and the coffee-cup shook in his fingers as he raised it.

"It's the last I'll ask you for," he continued, "and if you press him, Thurston will sign the check. He said he was coming, did he not?"

"Yes," was the answer. "Here is his note. It must be the last, Harry, for I have overdrawn my allowance already. You will notice that Geoffrey hesitates, and will not sign the check without seeing me. He will be here on Thursday."

Leslie took the letter with an eagerness which did not escape his wife, while, as the sum in question was small, she could not quite understand the satisfaction in his face. It had grown soddened and coarse of late, and there were times when she looked upon her husband with positive disgust. Still, she had, in spite of occasional disputes, resumed her efforts to play the part of a dutiful wife, and it was easier to pay her husband money than respect, the more so because he had usually some specious excuse, which appealed both to her ambition and her gambling instinct. At times he handed her small amounts of money, said to be her share of the profits on speculations, for which he required the loans.

"'Pressure of work, but must make an effort to see you as you suggest,'" Leslie read aloud. "H'm! 'Limit ex-

ceeded already. Will be in town, and try to call upon you on Thursday.'"

"It is very good of him," remarked Millicent. "He evidently finds every minute precious, and I am very reluctant to bring him here. I gather that, except for my request, he would have deferred his other business. Still, I suppose you must have the money, Harry?"

"I must," was the answer, and Leslie, who did not look up, busied himself with his plate. "Better write that you expect him, and I will post the note. By the way, I must remind you that we take the Eastern Fishery delegates on their steamer trip the day after to-morrow, and though there may be rather a mixed company, I want you to turn out smartly, and get hold of the best people. It would be well to see a mention of the handsome Mrs. Leslie in the newspaper report."

Millicent frowned. She was a vain woman, but she had some genuine pride, and there were limits to her forbearance. By the time her husband had induced her to withdraw her refusal to accompany him, it was too late further to discuss Thurston's visit, which was exactly what Leslie desired. Accordingly, well pleased with himself, he set out for his office, with a letter in his hand.

Mrs. Leslie had reason to remember the steamer excursion. A party of prominent persons had been invited to accompany the Fishery delegates on the maritime picnic, organized for the purpose of displaying the facilities that coast afforded for the prosecution of a new industry. It was difficult for the committee to draw a rigid line, and the company was decidedly mixed, more so than even Millicent at first surmised. Her husband, who acted as marshal, was kept busy most of the time, but she noticed a swift look of annoyance on his face when, before the steamer sailed, a tastefully-dressed young woman ascended the gangway, where he was receiving the guests. There was nothing dubious in the appearance of the lady or her

elderly companion, and yet Millicent felt that Leslie was troubled by their presence, and hesitated to let them pass. The younger lady, however, smiled upon him in a manner that suggested they had met before, and Leslie stood aside when Shackleby beckoned him with what looked like an ironical grin. Then the gangway was run in, and the engines started.

It was a mild day for the season, and Millicent, who found friends, dismissed the subject from her thoughts, when she saw her husband exchange no word with his latest guests. She was sitting with a young married lady, where the sun shone pleasantly in the shelter of the great white deck-house, when a sound of voices came out, with the odor of cigar smoke, from an open window.

"You fixed it all right?" observed one voice which sounded familiar, and there was a laugh which, though muffled, was more familiar still. While, with curiosity excited, Millicent listened, a companion broke in:

"Where's Mr. Leslie? I have scarcely seen him all morning."

"Making himself useful as usual. Discoursing on fisheries and harbors, of which he knows nothing, to men who know a good deal, and no doubt doing it very neatly," said Millicent, smiling.

"Why do you let him?" asked the other, with a little gesture of pride, which became her. "Now, my husband knows better than to stay away from me, even if he wanted to. Ah, here he is, bringing good things from the sunny South piled up on a tray."

Perhaps it was the contrast, for Millicent felt both resentful and neglected when a young man approached carrying choice fruits and cakes upon a nickeled tray; but before he reached them a voice came through the window again:

"You're quite certain? That man has eyes all over him, and it won't do to take any chances with him. He must be kept right here in Vancouver all night, and the

game will be in our own hands before he gets back again."

"I've done my best," was the answer, and Millicent fancied, but was not certain, that it was her husband who spoke. "I have fixed things so that he will come to Vancouver. The only worry is, can we depend upon the fellow I laid the odds with?"

"Oh, yes," responded the second voice. "I guess he knows better than fail me. By the way, you nearly made a fool of yourself over Coralie."

"Somebody inside there talking secrets," observed the younger lady. "I think it is Mr. Shackleby, and I don't like that man. Charley, set down that tray and carry my chair and Mrs. Leslie's at least a dozen yards away."

Millicent, at the risk of being guilty of eavesdropping, would have greatly preferred to stay where she was; but when the man did his wife's bidding, she could only follow and thank him. Lifting a cluster of fruit from the tray, she asked one question.

"Can you tell me, Mr. Nelson, who is Coralie?"

Nelson looked startled for a moment, and found it necessary to place another folding chair under the tray. He did not answer until his wife said:

"Didn't you hear Mrs. Leslie's question, Charley? Who is Coralie?"

"Sounds like the name of a variety actress," answered the man, by no means glibly. "Why should you ask me? I really don't know. I'm not good at conundrums. Isn't this a beautiful view? I fancied you'd have a better appetite up here than amid the crowd below."

Millicent's curiosity was further excited by the speaker's manner, but she could only possess her soul in patience, until presently it was satisfied on one point at least. She sat alone for a few minutes on the steamer's highest deck against the colored glass dome of the great white and gold saloon. Several of the brass-guarded lights were open wide, and, hearing a burst of laughter,

she looked down. The young woman, who had spoken to Leslie at the gangway, sat at a corner table, partly hidden by two carved pillars below. She held a champagne glass in a lavishly jeweled hand, and there was no doubt that she was pretty, but there was that in her suggestive laugh and mocking curve of the full red lips, something which set Millicent's teeth on edge. If more were needed to increase the unpleasant impression, a rich mine promoter sat near the young woman, trying to whisper confidentially, and another man, whose name was notorious in the city, laughed as he watched them. But Millicent had seen sufficient, and turning her head, looked out to sea. There were, however, several men smoking on the opposite side of the dome, and one of them also must have looked down, for his comment was audible.

"They're having what you call a good time down there! Who and what is she?"

"Ma'mselle Coralie. Ostensibly a *clairvoyante,*" was the dry reply.

"*Clairvoyante!*" repeated the first unseen speaker, who, by his clean intonation, Millicent set down as a newly-arrived Englishman. "Do you mean a professional soothsayer?"

"Something of the kind," said the other with a laugh. "We're a curious people marching in the forefront of progress, so we like to think, and yet we consult hypnotists and all kinds of fakirs, even about our business. Walk down —— Street and you'll see half-a-dozen of their name-plates. When they're young and handsome they get plenty of customers, and it's suspected that Coralie, with assistance, runs a select gambling bank of evenings. The charlatan is not tied to one profession."

"I catch on—correct phrase, isn't it?" rejoined the Englishman. "Of course, you're liberal minded and free from effete prejudice, but I hardly fancied the wives of your best citizens would care to meet such ladies."

"They wouldn't if they knew it!" was the answer.

"Coralie's a newcomer; such women are birds of passage, and before she grows too famous the police will move her on. In fact, I've been wondering how she got on board to-day."

"Leslie passed her up the gangway," said another man, adding, with a suggestive laugh as he answered another question: "Why did he do it? Well, perhaps he's had his fortune told, or you can ask him. Anyway, although I think he wanted to, he dared not turn her back."

Millicent, rising, slipped away. Trembling with rage, she was glad to lean upon the steamer's rail. She had discovered long ago that her husband was not a model of virtue, but the knowledge that his shortcomings were common property was particularly bitter to her. Of late she had dutifully endeavored to live on good terms with him, and it was galling to discover that he had only, it seemed, worked upon her softer mood for the purpose of extorting money to lavish upon illicit pleasures. She felt no man could sink lower than that, and determined there should be a reckoning that very night.

"My dear Mrs. Leslie," said a voice beside her. "Why, you look quite ill. My husband brought a bottle of stuff guaranteed to cure steamboat malady. Run and get it, Charley," and Millicent turned to meet her young married friend.

"Please don't trouble, Mr. Nelson. I am not in the least sea-sick," Millicent replied. "You might, however, spread out that deck chair for me. It is a passing faintness which will leave me directly."

She remembered nothing about the rest of the voyage, except that, when the steamer reached the wharf, her husband, who helped her down the gangway, said:

"I have promised to go to the conference and afterwards dine with the delegates, Millicent, so I dare say you will excuse me. I shall not be late if I can help it, and you might wait up for me."

Millicent, who had intended to wait for him, in any

case, merely nodded, and went home alone. She sat beside the English hearth all evening with an open book upside down upon her knee, and her eyes turned towards the clock, which very slowly ticked away the last hours she would spend beneath her husband's roof. There was spirit in her, and though she hardly knew why, she dressed herself for the interview carefully. When Leslie entered, his eyes expressed admiration as she rose with cold dignity and stood before him. Leslie was sober, but unfortunately for himself barely so, for the delegates had been treated with lavish Western hospitality, and there had been many toasts to honor during the dinner. He leaned against the wall with one hand on a carved bracket, looking down upon her with what seemed to be a leer of brutal pride upon his slightly-flushed face.

"You excelled yourself to-day, Millicent. I saw no end of folks admiring you," he said. "Most satisfactory day! Everything went off famously! Enjoyed yourself, eh?"

"I can hardly say I did, but that is not what you asked me to wait for," was the cold answer, and Millicent with native caution waited to hear what the man wanted before committing herself.

"No. I meant it, but it wasn't. I couldn't help saying I was proud of you." Leslie paused, doubtless satisfied, his wife thought, that he had smoothed the way sufficiently by a clumsy compliment. His abilities were not at their best just then. Millicent's thin lips curled scornfully as she listened.

"Thurston will be here on Thursday," he continued. "Never liked the man, but he has behaved decently as your trustee, and I want to be fair to him. Besides, he's a rising genius, and it's as well to be on good terms with him. Couldn't you get him to stay to dinner and talk over the way they've invested your legacy?"

"Do you think he would care to meet you?" asked Millicent, cuttingly.

"Perhaps he mightn't. You could have the Nelsons over, and press of business might detain me. Anyway, you'll have no time to settle all about that money and your English property if he goes out on the Atlantic train. You two seem to have got quite friendly again, and I'm tolerably sure he'd stay if you asked him."

Millicent's anger was rising all the time; but, because her suspicions increased every moment, she kept herself in hand. Feeling certain this was part of some plot, and that her husband was not steady enough to carry out his *rôle* cleverly, she desired to discover his exact intentions before denouncing him.

"Why should I press him?"

Had it been before the dinner Leslie might have acted more discreetly. As it was, he looked at the speaker somewhat blankly. "Why? Because I want you to. Now don't ask troublesome questions or put on your tragedy air, Millicent, but just promise to keep him here until after the east-bound train starts, anyway. I'm not asking for caprice—I—I particularly want a man to see him who will not be in the city until the following day."

Then, remembering what she had heard outside the steamer's deck house, a light suddenly broke in upon the woman. The man whose keen eyes would interfere with Shackleby's plans must be Thurston, and it was evident there was a scheme on hand to wreck his work in his absence. Once she had half-willingly assisted her husband to Thurston's detriment; but much had changed since then, and remembering that she had already, without knowing it, played into the confederate's hands by writing to him, her indignation mastered her.

"I could not persuade him against his wishes, and would not do so if I could," she declared, turning full upon her husband.

"You can and must," replied Leslie, whose passion blazed up. "I'm about sick of your obstinacy and fondness for dramatic situations. You could do anything with

any man you laid yourself out to inveigle, as I know to my cost, and in this case—by the Lord, I'll make you!"

"I will not!" Millicent's face was white with anger as she fixed her eyes on him. "For a few moments you shall listen to me. What you and Shackleby are planning does not concern me; but I will not move a finger to help you. Once before you said—what you have done—and if I have never forgotten it I tried to do so. This time I shall do neither. I have borne very much from you already, but, sunk almost to your level as I am, there are things I cannot stoop to countenance. For instance, the draft I am to cajole from Thurston is not intended for a speculation in mining shares, but—for Coralie."

The little carved bracket came down from the wall with a crash, and Leslie, whose face was swollen with fury, gripped the speaker's arm savagely. "After to-morrow you can do just what pleases you and go where you will," he responded in a voice shaking with rage and fear. "But in this I will make you obey me. As to Coralie, somebody has slandered me. The money is for what I told you, and nothing else."

Millicent with an effort wrenched herself free. "It is useless to protest, for I would not believe your oath," she said, looking at him steadily with contempt showing in every line of her pose. "Obey—you! As the man I, with blind folly, abandoned for you warned me, you are too abject a thing. Liar, thief, have I not said sufficient? —adulterer!"

"Quite!" cried Leslie, who yielded to the murderous fury which had been growing upon him, and leaning down struck her brutally upon the mouth. "What I am you have made me—and, by Heaven, it is time I repaid you in part."

Millicent staggered a little under the blow, which had been a heavy one, but her wits were clear, and, moving swiftly to a bell button, the pressure of her finger was answered by a tinkle below.

"I presume you do not wish to make a public scandal," she said thickly, for the lace handkerchief she removed from her smarting lips was stained with blood. Then, as their Chinese servant appeared in the doorway, "Your master wants you, John."

Before Leslie could grasp her intentions she had vanished, there was a rustle of drapery on the stairway, followed by the jar of a lock, and he was left face to face was the stolid Asiatic.

"Wantee someling, sah?" the Chinaman asked.

Leslie glared at him speechless until, with a humble little nod, the servant said:

"Linga linga bell; too much hullee, John quick come. Wantee someling. Linga linga bell."

"Go the devil. Oh, get out before I throw you," roared Leslie, and John vanished with the waft of a blue gown, while Millicent's book crashed against the door close behind his head.

CHAPTER XXVI

A RECKLESS JOURNEY

THE rising moon hung low above the lofty pines behind the city, when Millicent sank shivering into a chair beside the window of her bedroom. Under the impact of the blow her teeth had gashed her upper lip, but she did not feel the pain as she sat with hands clenched, looking down on the blaze of silver that grew broader across the inlet. She was faint and dizzy, incapable as yet of definite thought; but confused memories flashed through her brain, one among them more clearly than the rest. Instead of land-locked water shimmering beneath the Western pines, she saw dim English beeches with the coppery disk of the rising moon behind, and she heard a tall man speak with stinging scorn to one who cowered before him among the shadows.

"I was mad that night, and have paid for the madness ever since. Now when it is too late I know what I have lost!" she gasped with a catch of the breath that was a sob repressed.

There was a heavy step on the stairway, and Millicent shrank with the nausea of disgust as somebody tried the door. She drew a deep breath of relief, when the steps passed on unevenly.

The memories returned. They led her through a long succession of mistakes, falsehoods, slights and wrongs up to the present, and she shivered again, while a heavy drop of blood splashed warm upon her hand. Then she was mistress of herself once more, and a hazy purpose grew into definite shape. She could at least warn the man whom she had wronged, and so make partial reparation. It was not a wish for revenge upon her husband which prompted her to desire that amends might be made for

her past treachery. Smarting with shame, she longed only to escape from him. After the day's revelations she could never forgive that blow.

Millicent was a woman of action, and it was a relief to consider practical details. She decided that a telegram might lie for days at the station nearest the cañon, while what distance divided one from the other she did not know. There was no train before noon the next day, and she feared that the plot might be put into execution as soon as Geoffrey left his camp. Therefore, she must reach it before he did so. Afterwards—but she would not consider the future then, and, if she could but warn him, nothing mattered greatly, neither physical peril nor the risk of her good name.

It was long before Millicent Leslie had thought all this out, but when once her way seemed clear, exhausted by conflicting emotions, she sank into heavy slumber, and the sun was high before she awakened. Leslie had gone to his office, and she ate a little, chose her thickest furs, and waited for noon in feverish suspense. Her husband might return and prevent her departure by force. She feared that, should he guess her intention, a special locomotive might be hired, even after the train had started. It was, therefore, necessary to slip away without word or sign, unless, indeed, she could mislead him, and, smiling mirthlessly, she laid an open letter inside her writing-case.

At last the time came, and she went out carrying only a little hand-bag, passed along the unfrequented water side to the station by the wharf, and ensconced herself in the corner of the car nearest the locomotive, counting the seconds until it should start. Once she trembled when she saw Shackleby hurry along the platform, but she breathed again when he hailed a man leaning out from the vestibule of a car. At last, the big bell clanged, and the Atlantic express, rolling out of the station, began its race across the continent.

It was nearly dusk when, with a scream of brakes, the cars lurched into a desolate mountain station, and Millicent shivered as she alighted in the frost-dried dust of snow. A nipping wind sighed down the valley. The tall firs on the hillside were fading into phantom battalions of climbing trees, and above them towered a dim chaos of giant peaks, weirdly awe-inspiring under the last faint glimmer of the dying day. A few lights blinked among the lower firs, and Millicent, hurrying towards them at the station agent's direction, was greeted by the odors of coarse tobacco as she pushed open the door of the New Eldorado saloon.

A group of bronze-faced men, some in jackets of fringed deerskin and some in coarse blue jean, sat about the stove, and, though Millicent involuntarily shrank from them, there was no reason why she should feel any fear in their presence. They were rude of aspect—on occasion more rude of speech—but, in all the essentials that become a man, she would have found few to surpass them in either English or Western cities. There was dead silence as she entered, and the others copied him when one of the loungers, rising, took off his shapeless hat, not ungracefully.

"I want a guide and good horse to take me to Thurston's camp in the Orchard River Cañon to-night," she said.

The men looked at one another, and the one who rose first replied: "Sorry to disappoint you, ma'am, but it's clean impossible. We'll have snow by morning, and it's steep chances a man couldn't get through in the dark now the shelf on the wagon trail's down."

"I must go. It is a matter of life and death, and I'm willing to pay whoever will guide me proportionate to the risk," insisted Millicent, shaking out on the table a roll of bills. Then, because she was a woman of quick perceptions, and noticed something in the big axeman's honest face, she added quickly, "I am in great distress,

and disaster may follow every moment lost. Is there nobody in this settlement with courage enough to help me?"

This time the listeners whispered as they glanced sympathetically at the speaker. The big man said:

"If you're willing to face the risk I'll go with you. You can put back most of your money; but, because we're poor men you'll be responsible for the horses."

Millicent felt the cold strike through her with the keenness of steel when she went out into the night. Somebody lifted her to the back of a snorting horse, and a man already mounted seized its bridle. There was a shout of "Good luck!" and they had started on their adventurous journey. Loose floury snow muffled the beat of hoofs, the lights of the settlement faded behind and the two were alone in a wilderness of awful white beauty, wherein it seemed no living thing had broken the frozen silence since the world was made. Staring vacantly before her Millicent saw the shoulders of the mighty peaks looming far above her through a haze of driving snow, which did not reach the lower slopes, where even the wind was still. The steam of the horses hung in white clouds about them as they climbed, apparently for hours, past scattered vedettes of dwindling pines. After a long pull on a steep trail the man checked the horses on the brink of a chasm filled with eddying mist.

"That should have been our way, but the whole blame trail slipped down into the valley," the man said. "Let me take hold of your bridle and trust to me. We're going straight over the spur yonder until we strike the trail again."

It was no longer a ride but a scramble. Even those sure-footed horses stumbled continually, and where the wind had swept the thin snow away, the iron on the sliding hoofs clanged on ice-streaked rock, or hundredweights of loose gravel rattled down the incline. Then there was juniper to be struggled through. They came to slopes almost precipitous up which the panting guide somehow

dragged the horses, but, one strong with muscular vigor and the other sustained by sheer force of will, the two riders held stubbornly on. Millicent had risen superior to physical weakness that night.

"Four hours to the big divide! We've pretty well equaled Thurston's record," said the guide, striking a match inside his hollowed palm to consult his watch. "It's all down grade now, but we'll meet the wind in the long pass and maybe the snow."

Millicent's heart almost failed her when, as the match went out, she gazed down into the gulf of darkness that opened at her feet, but she answered steadily: "Press on. I must reach the camp by daylight, whatever happens."

They went on. The pace, instead of a scramble, became in places a wild glissade, and no beast of burden but a mountain pack-horse could have kept its footing ten minutes. Dark pines rose up from beneath them and faded back of them, here and there a scarred rock or whitened boulder flitted by, and then Millicent's sight was dimmed by a whirling haze of snow. How long the descent lasted she did not know. She could see nothing through the maze of eddying flakes but that a figure, magnified by them to gigantic proportions, rode close beside her, until they left the cloud behind and wound along the face of a declivity, which dipped into empty blackness close beneath.

Suddenly her horse stumbled; there was a flounder and a shock, and Millicent felt herself sliding very swiftly down a long slope of crusted snow. Hoarse with terror, she screamed once, then something seized and held her fast, and she rose, shaking in every limb, to cling breathless to the guide.

"Hurt bad?" he gasped. "No!—I'm mighty glad. Snow slide must have gouged part of the trail out. Can you hold up a minute while I 'tend to the horse?"

"I don't think I am much hurt," stammered Millicent,

whose teeth were chattering, and the man floundering back a few paces, stooped over a dark object that struggled in the snow. She fancied that he fumbled at his belt, after which there was a horrible gurgle, and he returned rubbing his fingers suggestively with a handful of snow.

"Poor brute's done for—I had to settle him," he explained. "It will cost you—but we can fix that when we get through. I'll have to change your saddle, and the sooner we get on the better. Won't keep you five minutes, ma'am."

Millicent felt very cold and sick, for the unfortunate horse still struggled feebly, while the gurgle continued, and she was devoutly thankful when they continued their journey. The traveling was, if possible, more arduous than before. At times they forced a passage through climbing forest, and again over slopes of treacherous shale where a snow slide had plowed a great hollow in the breast of the hill. The puffs of snow which once more met them grew thicker until Millicent was sheeted white all over. At last the man said:

"It can't be far off daylight and I'm mighty thankful. I've lost my bearings, but we're on a trail, which must lead to somewhere, at last. Stick tight to your saddle and I'll bring you through all right, ma'am."

Millicent was too cold to answer. A blast that whirled the drifts up met her in the face, numbing all her faculties and rendering breathing difficult. The hand that held the bridle was stiffened into uselessness. Still, while life pulsed within her, she was going on, and swaying in the saddle, she fixed her eyes ahead.

At last the trail grew level, the snow thinner. In the growing light of day a cluster of roofs loomed up before her, and she made some incoherent answer when her guide confessed:

"I struck the wrong way at the forking of the trail. Here's a ranch, however, and the camp can't be far away.

Horse is used up and so am I, but you could get somebody to take Thurston a message."

Some minutes later he lifted Millicent from the saddle, and she leaned against him almost powerless as he pounded on the door. The loud knocking was answered by voices within, the door swung open, and Millicent reeled into a long hall. Two women rose from beside the stove, and, for it was broad daylight now, stared in bewilderment at the strangers.

The guide leaned wearily against the wall, while Millicent, overcome by the change of temperature, stood clutching at the table and swaying to and fro. Then her failing strength deserted her. Somebody who helped her into a chair presently held a cup of warm liquid to her lips. She gulped down a little, and, recovering command of her senses, found herself confronted by Helen Savine. It was a curious meeting, and even then Millicent remembered under what circumstances they had last seen each other. It appeared probable that Helen remembered, too, for she showed no sign of welcome, and Mrs. Thomas Savine, who picked up the fallen cup, watched them intently.

"I see you are surprised to find me here," said Millicent, with a gasp. "I left the railroad last night for Geoffrey Thurston's camp. We lost the trail and one of the horses in the snow, and just managed to reach this ranch. We can drag ourselves no further. I did not know the ranch belonged to you."

"That's about it!" the guide broke in. "This lady has made a journey that would have killed some men—it has pretty well used me up, anyway. I'll sit down in the corner if you don't mind. Can't keep myself right end up much longer."

"Please make yourself comfortable!" said Helen, with a compassionate glance in his direction. "I will tell our Chinaman to see to your horse." She turned towards Millicent, and her face was coldly impassive. "Anyone

in distress is welcome to shelter here. You were going to Mr. Thurston's camp?"

Even Mrs. Savine had started at Millicent's first statement, and now she read contemptuous indignation in Helen's eyes. It was certain her niece's voice, though even, was curiously strained.

"Yes!" answered Millicent, rapidly. "I was going to Geoffrey Thurston's camp. It is only failing strength that hinders me from completing the journey. Somebody must warn him at once that he is on no account to leave for Vancouver as he promised me that he would. There is a plot to ruin him during his absence—a traitor among his workmen, I think. At any moment the warning may be too late. He was starting west to-day to call on me."

Millicent was half-dazed and perhaps did not reflect that it was possible to draw a damaging inference from her words. Nevertheless, there was that in Helen's expression which awoke a desire for retaliation.

Helen asked but one question, "You risked your life to tell him this?" and when Millicent bent her head the guide interposed, "You can bet she did, and nearly lost it."

"Then," said the girl, "the warning must not be thrown away. Unfortunately, we have nobody I could send just now. Auntie, you must see to Mrs. Leslie; I will go myself."

"I'm very sorry, miss. If you like I'll do my best, but can hardly promise that I won't fall over on the way," apologized the guide; but Helen hastened out of the room, and now that the strain was over, Millicent lay helpless in her chair. Still, she was conscious of a keen disappointment. After all she had dared and suffered, it was Helen who would deliver the warning.

Thurston was standing knee-deep in ground-up stone and mire, inside a coffer dam about which the river frothed and roared, when a man brought him word that Miss Savine waited for him. He hurried to meet her,

and presently halted beside her horse—a burly figure in shapeless slouch hat, with a muddy oilskin hanging from his shoulders above the stained overalls and long boots.

Helen sat still in the saddle, a strange contrast to him, for she was neat and dainty down to the little foot in Indian dressed deerskin against the horse's flank. She showed no sign of pleasure as she returned his greeting, but watched him keenly as she said:

"Mrs. Leslie arrived this morning almost frozen at the ranch. She left the railroad last night to reach your camp, but her guide lost the trail."

The man was certainly startled, but his face betrayed no satisfaction. It's most visible expression was more akin to annoyance.

"Could she not have waited?" he asked impatiently, adding somewhat awkwardly, "Did Mrs. Leslie explain why she wanted to see me so particularly?"

"Yes," was the quick answer. "She has reason to believe that while you journeyed to Vancouver to visit her, an attempt would be made to wreck these workings. She bade me warn you that there is a traitor in your camp."

"Ah," replied Geoffrey, a flush showing through the bronze on his forehead. He thought hastily of all his men and came back to the consciousness of Helen's presence with a start. "It was very good of you to face the rough cold journey, but you cannot return without rest and refreshment," he said with a look that spoke of something more than gratitude. "I will warn my foremen, and when it seems safe will ride back with you."

If Helen had been gifted with a wider knowledge of life she might perhaps have noticed several circumstances that proved Thurston blameless. As it was she had a quick temper, and at first glance facts spoke eloquently against him.

"You cannot," was the cold answer. "The warning was very plain, and considering all that is at stake you must not leave the workings a moment. Neither are any

thanks due to me. I am an interested party, and the person who has earned your gratitude is Mrs. Leslie. The day is clear and fine, and I can dispense with an escort."

"You shall not go alone," declared Thurston, doggedly. "You can choose between my company and that of my assistant. And you shall not go until you rest. Further, I must ask you a favor. Will you receive Mrs. Leslie until I have seen her and arranged for her return? There is no married rancher within some distance, and I cannot well bring her here."

"You cannot," agreed Helen averting her eyes. "If only on account of the service she has rendered, Mrs. Leslie is entitled to such shelter as we can offer her, as long as it appears necessary."

"Thanks!" said Thurston, gravely. "You relieve me of a difficulty." Then, stung by the girl's ill-concealed disdain into one of his former outbreaks, he gripped the horse's bridle, and backed the beast so that he and its rider were more fully face to face.

"Am I not harassed sufficiently? Good Lord! do you think——" he began.

"I have neither the right nor desire to inquire into your motives," responded Helen distantly. "We will, as I say, shelter Mrs. Leslie, and, since you insist, will you ask your assistant to accompany me?"

Geoffrey, raising his hat a moment, swung round upon his heel, and blew a silver whistle.

"Tom," he said to the man who came running up, "tell John to get some coffee and the nicest things he can in a hurry for Miss Savine. Straighten up my office room, and lay them out there. English Jim is to ride back with Miss Savine when she is ready. Send a mounted man to Allerton's to bring Black in, see that no man you wouldn't trust your last dollar to lay's hand on a machine. That would stop half the work in camp? It wouldn't—confound you—you know what I mean. Call in all ex-

plosives from the shot-firing gang. Nobody's to slip for a moment out of sight of his section foreman."

Helen heard the crisp sharp orders as she rode up the hill, and glanced once over her shoulder. She had often noticed how the whole strength of Geoffrey's character could rise to face a crisis. Still, appearances were terribly against him.

Geoffrey, taking breath for a moment, scowled savagely at the river.

"If ever there was an unfortunate devil—but I suppose it can't be helped. Damn the luck that dogs me!" he ejaculated as he turned to issue more specific commands.

CHAPTER XXVII

MRS. SAVINE SPEAKS HER MIND

MILLICENT slept brokenly while Helen carried her message, and awakening feverish, felt relieved to discover that the girl was still absent. Miss Savine was younger than herself, and of much less varied experience, but the look in the girl's eyes hurt her, nevertheless.

"I am ashamed to force myself upon you," she said to Mrs. Savine, who had shown her many small courtesies, "but I am afraid I cannot manage the journey back to the railroad to-day. I must also see Mr. Thurston before I leave for England, and it would be a great favor if I could have the interview here."

"We are glad to have you with us," said Mrs. Savine, who was of kindly nature and fancied she saw her opportunity. "Yes, I just mean it. The journey has tried you so much that you are not fit for another now. Besides, I have heard so much about you, that I want a talk with you."

"You have probably heard nothing that makes this visit particularly welcome," answered Millicent, bitterly, and the elder lady smiled.

"I guess folks are apt to make the most of the worst points in all of us," she observed. "But that is not what we are going to talk about. You are an old friend of a man we are indebted to, and, just because I believe there's no meanness in Geoffrey Thurston, you are very welcome to the best that we can do for you. I will ask him over to meet you."

Millicent flushed. Under the circumstances she was touched by the speaker's sincerity, and grateful for the way she expressed herself. Perhaps it was this which

prompted her to an almost involuntary outpouring of confidence.

"I am the woman who should have married him," she said simply.

Mrs. Savine merely nodded, and dipped her needle somewhat blindly into the embroidery on her knee before she replied: "I had guessed it already. You missed a very good husband, my dear. I don't want to force your confidence, but I imagine that you have some distress to bear, and I might help you. I have seen a good deal of trouble in my time."

Millicent was unstable by nature. She was also excited and feverish. Afterwards she wondered why a kindly word from a woman she knew so slightly should excite in her such a desire for advice and sympathy. In spite of her occasional brusqueries, it was hard for anyone to say no to Mrs. Savine. So Millicent answered, with a sigh:

"I know it now when it is too late—no one knows it better. You do well to believe in Geoffrey Thurston."

Mrs. Savine looked at her very keenly, then nodded. "I believe in you, too. There! I guess you can trust me."

Millicent bent her head, and her eyes were misty. A raw wound, which the frost had irritated, marred the delicate curve of her upper lip. It became painfully visible.

"It is only fit that I should tell you, since I am your guest," she said, touching the scar with one finger. "That is the mark of my husband's hand, and I am leaving him forever because I would not connive at Geoffrey's ruin. Geoffrey is acting as trustee for my property, and I cannot leave for England without consulting him. So much is perhaps due to you, and—because of your kindness I should not like you to think too ill of me—I will tell you the rest. To begin with, Geoffrey has never shown me anything but kindness."

Mrs. Savine gently patted the speaker's arm, and Millicent related what had led up to her journey, or part of it. When she had finished, the elder lady commented:

"You are doing a risky thing; but I can't quite blame you, and if I could, I would not do it now. You will stay right here until Geoffrey has fixed up all plans for your journey, and you can trust me to be kind to you. Still, there's one favor I'm going to ask. I want you to let me tell my niece as much of what you have told me as I think desirable. Remember, Geoffrey has been good to you."

For a moment Millicent's face grew hard, and her eyes defiant. She smiled sadly as she answered: "It is his due, and can make no difference now. Tell her what seems best."

Meanwhile, Geoffrey was busy in the cañon camp. With Black and Mattawa Tom beside him, he stood holding as symbol, both of equality and authority, a bright ax in his hand, while driller, laborer, and machine-tender, wondering greatly, were passed in review before him. Black had been boarded with a trust rancher some distance from the camp. At last a certain rock driller passed in turn, and Tom from Mattawa explained: "He's a friend of Walla Jake, and as I told you, the last man we put on."

"That's the blame reptile who backed up Shackleby's story at the Blue Bird mine," cried Black, excitedly. "If there's anyone up to mischief, you can bet all you've got he's the man."

"Stop there, you!" Geoffrey's voice was sharp and stern. "Cut him down if he feels for a revolver or tries to make a break of it, section foreman. Come here, close in behind him, you two."

After a swift glance over his shoulder the man who was summoned advanced, scowling darkly. He sullenly obeyed Geoffrey's second command, "Stand there—now

a few steps aside," leaving his footprints clearly outlined in a patch of otherwise untrodden snow.

"Good!" observed Geoffrey. "Lay your templet on those marks, Tom." After the foreman had produced a paper pattern which fitted them, Thurston added: "We're going to make a prisoner of you, and jail you ourselves, until we can get a formal warrant. What for? Well, you're going to be tried for conspiracy among the other things. You see that pattern? It fits the foot of a man who went out one night with a spy Shackleby sent over to see how and when you would play the devil with our work in the cañon. It even shows the stump of the filed-off creeper-spike on your right boot. There's no use protesting—a friend of yours here will help us to trace your career back to the finding of the Blue Bird mine. Take him along and lock him into the galvanized store shed."

The prisoner was taken away, and Geoffrey turned to his foreman.

"He was in the drilling gang, Tom?"

"Juss so! Working under the wall bed of the cañon."

"That lets some light on to the subject. You can dismiss the others. Come with me, Tom."

Twenty minutes later Geoffrey stood among the boulders that the shrunken river had left exposed near the foot of a giant cliff which, instead of overhanging, thrust forward a slanting spur into the rush of water, and so formed a bend. It was one of the main obstacles Geoffrey, who wondered at the formation, had determined to remove by the simultaneous shock of several heavy blasting charges. To that end a gang of men had long been drilling deep holes into the projecting spur, and on the preceding day charges of high explosives had been sunk in most of them with detonators and fuses ready coupled for connection to the igniting gear. Geoffrey stood upon a boulder and looked up at the tremendous face of rock which, rising above the spur, held up the hill slope above. The

stratification was looser than usual, and several mighty masses had fallen from it into the river. There were also crannies at its feet.

"You've seen all the drilled holes. Anything strike you yet?" inquired Mattawa Tom.

"Yes," was the answer. "It occurs to me that French Louis said he couldn't tally out all the sticks of giant powder that he'd stowed away a week or two ago. I think you foolishly told him he couldn't count straight."

"I did," admitted Tom from Mattawa. "Louis ain't great at counting, and he allowed he'd never let go of the key to the powder magazine."

"I fancy a smart mechanic could make a key that would do as well," remarked Geoffrey. "It strikes me, also, after considering the strata yonder, that, if sufficient shots were fired in those crannies, they would bring the whole cliff and the hillside above it down on top of us—you'll remember I cautioned you to drill well clear of the rock face itself? Now, if coupled fuses were led from the shot holes we filled to those we didn't, so that both would fire simultaneously, nobody afterwards would find anything suspicious under several thousand tons of débris. I'm inclined to think there are such fuses. Take your shovel, and we'll look for them."

They worked hard for half an hour, and then Geoffrey chuckled. Lifting what looked like a stout black cord from among the rubble where it was carefully hidden, Mattawa Tom said: "This time I guess you've struck it dead."

"Follow the thing up," Geoffrey commanded.

This was done, and further searching revealed the charges for which they were searching, skillfully concealed in the crannies. Geoffrey's face was grim as he said:

"It was planned well. They would have piled half yonder shoulder of the range into the cañon if they had got their devilish will. Pull up every fuse, and fix fresh

detonators to all the charges. Change every man in that gang, and never leave this spot except when the section boss replaces you, until we're ready for firing. Thank Heaven that will be in a few more days, and my nerves may hold out that long. I've hardly had an hour's sleep in the last week, Tom."

While Geoffrey was acting in accordance with the warning she had delivered, Helen was on her way back to the ranch with his assistant as her escort. Helen had not forgotten that it was her remonstrance which had originally obtained a humble appointment for English Jim. He had several times visited the ranch with messages, and was accordingly invited to enter when they reached the house. He recognized Mrs. Leslie at once, but he could be discreet, and, warned by something in her manner, addressed no word to her until he found opportunity for a few moments' private speech before leaving.

"You remember me, I see," Millicent said, and English Jim bowed.

"I do; perhaps because I have reason to. Though most reluctant to say so, I lost a valuable paper the last time I was in your presence, and that paper was afterwards used against my employer. Pardon me for speaking so plainly; you said you were a friend of Mr. Thurston's."

"You need not be diffident," replied Millicent, checking him with a wave of her hand. "Suppose it was I who found the drawing? You would be willing to keep silence in return for——"

It was English Jim who interrupted now. "In return for your solemn promise to render no more assistance to our enemies. I do not forget your kindness, and hate the painful necessity of speaking so to you, but I am Thurston's man, soul and body."

"I ask your pardon," said Millicent. "Will you believe me if I say that I lately ran some risk to bring Mr. Thurston a much-needed warning? I am going to Eng-

land in a day or two, and shall never come back again. Therefore, you can rely upon my promise."

"Implicitly," returned English Jim. "You must have had some reason I cannot guess for what you did. That sounds like presumption, doesn't it? But you can count upon my silence, madam."

"You are a good man," Millicent impulsively held out her hand to him. "I have met very few so loyal or so charitable. May I wish you all prosperity in your career?"

English Jim merely bowed as he went out, and Millicent's eyes grew dim as she thought of her treachery to Geoffrey.

"There are good men in the world after all, though it has been my misfortune to chiefly come across the bad," she admitted to herself.

Darkness had fallen when Thurston rode up to the ranch. He passed half an hour alone with Millicent and went away without speaking to anyone else. After he had gone Millicent said to Mrs. Savine:

"I start for England as soon as possible, and Mr. Thurston is going to the railroad with me. I shall never return to Canada."

Pleading fatigue, she retired early, and for a time Mrs. Savine and Helen sat silently in the glow of the great hearth upon which immense logs were burning. There was no other light in the room, and each flicker of the fire showed that Helen's face was more than usually serious.

"Did you know that it was Mrs. Leslie Geoffrey should have married?" asked Mrs. Savine at length.

"No," answered Helen, flushing. With feeling she added. "Perhaps I ought to have guessed it. She leaves shortly, does she not? It will be a relief. She must be a wicked woman, but please don't talk of her."

"That is just what I'm going to do," declared her aunt, gravely. "I wouldn't guarantee that she is wholly

good, but I blame her poison-mean husband more than her. Anyway, she is better than you suppose her."

"I made no charge against her, and am only glad she is going," said Helen Savine. Mrs. Savine smiled shrewdly.

"Well, I am going to show you there is nothing in that charge. Not quite logical, is it, but sit still there and listen to me."

Helen listened, at first very much against her will, presently she grew half-convinced, and at last wholly so. She blushed crimson as she said:

"May I be forgiven for thinking evil—but such things do happen, and though I several times made myself believe, even against the evidence of my eyes, that I was wrong, appearances were horribly against her. I am tired and will say good-night, auntie."

"Not yet," interposed Mrs. Savine, laying a detaining grasp upon her. "Sit still, my dear, I'm only beginning. Appearances don't always count for much. Now, there's Mrs. Christopher who started in to copy my elixir. Oh, yes, it was like it in smell and color, but she nearly killed poor Christopher with it."

"She said it cured him completely," commented Helen, hoping to effect a diversion; but Mrs. Savine would not be put off.

"We won't argue about that, though there'll be a coroner called in the next time she makes a foolish experiment. Now I'm going to give my husband's confidences away. Hardly fair to Tom, but I'll do it, because it seems necessary, and the last time I didn't go quite far enough. To begin with. Did you know the opposition wanted to buy Geoffrey over, paying him two dollars for every one he could have made out of your father?"

"No," answered Helen, starting. "It was very loyal of him to refuse. Why did he do so?"

Mrs. Savine smiled good-humoredly. "I guess you think that's due to your dignity, but you don't fool me.

Look into your mirror, Helen, if you really want to know. Did you hear that he put every dollar he'd made in Canada into the scheme? Of course you didn't; he made Tom promise he would never tell you. Besides—but I forgot, I must not mention that."

"Please spare me any more, auntie," pleaded Helen, who was overcome by a sudden realization of her own injustice and absolute selfishness.

"No mercy this time," was the answer, given almost genially. "Like the elixir which doesn't taste pleasant, it's good for you. You didn't know, either, for the same reason, that not long ago Tom was badly scared for fear he'd have to let the whole thing go for lack of money. It would have been the end of Julius Savine if he had been forced to give up this great enterprise."

"I never thought things were so bad, but how does it concern Mr. Thurston?" Helen questioned her aunt in a voice that was trembling.

"Geoffrey straightened out all the financial affairs in just this way. A relative in England left an estate to be divided between him and Mrs. Leslie. There was enough to keep him safe for life, if he'd let it lie just where it was, but he didn't. No, he sold out all that would have earned him a life income for any price he could, and turned over every cent of it to help your father. Now I've about got through, but I've one question to ask you. Would the man who did all that—you can see why—be likely to fool with another man's wife, even if it was the handsome Mrs. Leslie?"

"No," said Helen, whose cheeks, which had grown pallid, flushed like a blush rose. "I am glad you told me, auntie, but I feel I shall never have the courage to look that man in the face again."

Mrs. Savine smiled, though her eyes glistened in the firelight as she laid a thin hand on one of Helen's, which felt burning hot as the fingers quivered within her grasp.

"You will, or that will hurt him more than all," she

replied. "It wasn't easy to tell you this, but I've seen too many lives ruined for the want of a little common-sense talking—and I figure Jacob wouldn't come near beating Geoffrey Thurston."

Helen rose abruptly. "Auntie, you will see to father—he has been better lately—for just a little while, will not you?" she asked. "Mrs. Crighton has invited me so often to visit her, and I really need a change. This valley has grown oppressive, and I must have time to think."

"Yes," assented Mrs. Savine. "But you must stand by your promise to fire the final shot."

The door closed, and Mrs. Savine, removing her spectacles, wiped both them and her eyes as she remarked: "I hope the Almighty will forgive a meddlesome old woman for interfering, knowing she means well."

CHAPTER XXVIII

LESLIE STEPS OUT

Henry Leslie did not return home at noon on the day following the altercation with his wife. Millicent had an ugly temper, but she would cool down if he gave her time, he said to himself. In the evening he fell in with two business acquaintances from a mining district, who were visiting the city for the purpose of finding diversion and they invited him to assist them in their search for amusement. Leslie, though unprincipled, lacked several qualities necessary for a successful rascal, and, oppressed by the fear of Shackleby's displeasure should Thurston return to the mountains prematurely, and uncertain what to do, was willing to try to forget his perplexities for an hour or two.

The attempt was so far successful that he went home at midnight, somewhat unsteadily, a good many dollars poorer than when he set out. Trying the door of his wife's room, he found it locked. He did not suspect that it had been locked on the outside and that Millicent had thrown the key away. He was, however, rather relieved than otherwise by the discovery of the locked door, and, sleeping soundly, wakened later than usual next morning. Millicent, however, was neither at the breakfast-table nor in her own room when he pried the door open. He saw that some garments and a valise were missing, and decided that she had favored certain friends with her company, and, returning mollified, would make peace again, as had happened before. Still, he was uneasy until he espied her writing-case with the end of a letter protruding. Reading the latter, he discovered it to be an invitation to Victoria. He noticed on the blotter the reversed impression

of an addressed envelope, which showed that she had answered the invitation. Two days passed, and, hearing nothing, he grew dissatisfied again, and drafted a diplomatic telegram to the friends in Victoria. It happened that Shackleby was in his office when the answer arrived.

"Has Thurston come into town yet? You told me you saw your way to keep him here," said Shackleby. "Didn't you mention he had the handling of a small legacy left Mrs. Leslie?"

"It is strange, but he has not arrived," was the answer. "My wife is an old friend of his, and I had counted on her help in detaining him, but, unfortunately, she considered it necessary to accept an invitation to Victoria somewhat suddenly."

"I should hardly have fancied Thurston was an old friend of—yours," Shackleby remarked with a carelessness which almost blunted the sneer. "I'm also a little surprised at what you tell me, because I saw Mrs. Leslie hurrying along to the Atlantic express. She couldn't book that way to Victoria."

"You must have been mistaken," said Leslie, who turned towards a clerk holding out a telegraphic envelope. He ripped it open and read the enclosure with a smothered ejaculation.

"Can't understand your wire. Mrs. Leslie not here. Wrote saying she could not come."

"Excuse the liberty. I believe I have a right to inspect all correspondence," observed Shackleby, coolly leaning over and picking up the message. Then he looked straight at Leslie, and there was a moment's silence before he asked, "How much does Mrs. Leslie know about your business?"

"I don't know," answered the anxious man in desperation. "I had to tell her a little so that she could help me."

"So I guessed!" commented Shackleby. "Now, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but you can't afford to quarrel with me if I do. You're coming straight with me to the depot to find out where Mrs. Leslie bought a ticket to."

"I'll see you hanged first," broke out Leslie. "Isn't it enough that you presume to read my private correspondence? I'll suffer no interference with my domestic affairs."

Shackleby laughed contemptuously. "You'll just come along instead of blustering—there's not an ounce of real grit in you. This is no time for sentiment, and you have admitted that Mrs. Leslie was on good terms with Thurston. If she has warned him, one of us at least will have to make a record break out of this country. If he doesn't it won't be the divorce court he'll figure in."

Leslie went without further protest, and Shackleby looked at him significantly when the booking-clerk said, "If I remember right, Mrs. Leslie bought a ticket for Thompson's. It's a flag station at the head of the new road that's to be driven into the Orchard Valley."

"I guess that's enough," remarked Shackleby. "You and I are going there by the first train too. Oh, yes, I'm coming with you whether you like it or not, for it strikes me our one chance is to bluff Thurston into a bargain for the cessation of hostilities. It's lucky he's supposed to be uncommonly short of money."

Geoffrey Thurston, Mrs. Leslie, and Thomas Savine of course, could not know of this conversation, but the woman was anxious as they rode together into sight of the little flag station shortly before the Atlantic express was due. When the others dismounted, Thomas Savine, who had been summoned by telegram from Vancouver, remained discreetly behind. It was very cold, darkness was closing down on the deep hollow among the hills, and some little distance up the ascending line, a huge freight locomotive was waiting with a string of cars behind it in a

side track. Thurston pointed to the fan-shaped blaze of the great head lamp.

"We have timed it well. They're expecting your train now," he said.

"I am glad," was Millicent's answer. "I shall feel easier when I am once upon the way, for all day I have been nervously afraid that Harry might arrive or something unexpected might happen to detain me. There will be only time to catch the Allan boat, you say, and once the train leaves this station nobody could overtake me?"

"Of course not!" answered Geoffrey, reassuringly. "It is perhaps natural that you should be apprehensive, but there is no reason for it. Whether you are doing right or wrong I dare not presume to judge, and, under the circumstances, I wish there had been somebody else to counsel you; but if your husband has treated you cruelly and you are in fear of him, I cannot venture to dissuade you. You will write to me when you have settled your plans?"

"Yes," she promised. After a moment's pause, she went on: "I have hardly been able to consider the position yet, but I will never go back to Harry. My trustees must either help me to fight him or bribe him not to molest me. It is a hateful position, but though I have suffered a great deal there are things I cannot countenance."

The hoot of a whistle came ringing up the valley, the light of another head lamp, growing brighter, flickered among the firs, and Millicent looked up at her companion as she said:

"I may never see you again, Geoffrey, but I cannot go without asking you to forgive me. You do not know, and I dare not tell you, in how many ways I have injured you. I would like to think that you do not cherish any ill-will against me."

"You may be quite sure of it," was the answer, and Geoffrey smiled upon her. "What I shall remember most clearly is how much you risked to warn me, and that the

safe completion of the work I have set my heart on is due to you. We will forget all the unpleasant things that have happened in the past and meet as good friends next time, Millicent."

The woman's voice trembled a little as she replied: "I hope when one by one you hear of the unpleasant things you will be charitable. But a last favor—you will not tell Harry where I have gone until I am safely on my way to England?"

"No," promised Geoffrey. "You can depend upon that. I have not forgiven your husband, but the train is coming in and it will only stop a few seconds."

With couplings clashing the long cars lurched in. Geoffrey hurried Millicent into one of them. He felt his hand grasped fervently, and fancied he saw a tear glisten in Millicent's eyes by the light of the flashing lamps. Then the great engine snorted, and he sprang down from the vestibule footboard as the train rolled out. Turning back towards the station to join Thomas Savine, he found himself confronted by two men who had just alighted.

Their surprise was mutual, but Thomas Savine, who stood beside a box just hurled out of the baggage car, had his wits about him. "Here's one case, Geoffrey. The conductor thinks that some fool must have labelled the others wrong, and they'll come on by first freight," he said.

This was an accurate statement, and for Millicent's sake Geoffrey was grateful that his comrade should make it so opportunely. It accounted for his presence at the station.

"It can't be helped," he said, and then turned stiffly towards Shackleby and Henry Leslie, who waited between him and the roadway.

"We want a few words with you, but didn't expect to find you here," abruptly remarked Shackleby. "Is there any place fit to sit in at the saloon yonder?"

"I really don't know," Geoffrey replied. "Having no

time to waste in conversation, neither do I care. If you have anything to say to me you can say it—very briefly —here."

Shackleby pinched the cigar he was smoking. Laying his hand on Leslie's shoulder warningly, he whispered, "Keep still, you fool."

"I don't know that I can condense what I have to say," he answered airily, addressing Thurston. "Fact is, in the first place, and before Mr. Leslie asks a question, I want to know whether we—that is I—can still come to terms with you. It's tolerably well-known that my colleagues are, so to speak, men of straw, and individually I figure it might be better for both of us if we patched up a compromise. I can't sketch out the rest of my programme in the open air, but, as a general idea, what do you think, Mr. Savine?"

"That your suggestion comes rather late in the day," was the answer.

Shackleby was silent for a moment, though, for it was quite dark now that the train had gone. Savine could not be quite certain whether he moved against Leslie by accident or deliberately hustled him a few paces away. Geoffrey, however, felt certain that neither had seen Millicent, nor, thanks to Savine, suspected that she was on board the departing cars. Just then a deep-toned whistle vibrated across the pines, somebody waved a lantern between the rails, and the panting of the freight locomotive's pump became silent. The track led down grade past the station towards the coast.

"Better late than never," said Shackleby. "My hand's a good one still. I'm not sure I won't call you."

"To save time I'll show you mine a little sooner than I meant to do, and you'll see the game's up," replied Geoffrey, grimly. "It may prevent you from worrying me during the next week or two, and you can't well profit by it. I've got Black, who is quite ready to go into court at any time, where you can't get at him. I've got the

nearest magistrate's warrant executed on the person of your other rascal, and Black will testify as to his record, which implies the throwing of a sidelight upon your own. No doubt, to save himself, the other man will turn against you. In addition, if it's necessary, which I hardly thing possible, I have even more damaging testimony. I have sworn a statement before the said magistrate for the Crown-lands authorities, and purpose sending a copy to each of your directors individually. That ought to be sufficient, and I have no more time to waste with you."

"But you have me to settle with, or I'll blast your name throughout the province if I drag my own in the mud. Where's my wife?" snarled Leslie, wrenching himself free from his confederate's restraining grasp.

"If you're bent on making a fool of yourself, and I guess you can't help it, go on your own way," interposed Shackleby, with ironical contempt.

"I have no intention of telling you where Mrs. Leslie is," asserted Geoffrey. "You will hear from her when she considers it advisable to write."

A whir of driver wheels slipping on the rails came down the track, followed by a shock of couplings tightening and the snorting of a heavy locomotive, but none of the party noticed it.

"She was here; you can't deny it," shouted Leslie, who had yielded to a fit of rabid fury. He was not a courageous man, and had been held in check by fear of Shackleby, but there was some spirit in him, and, perhaps because he had injured Thurston, had always hated him. Now when his case seemed desperate, with the boldness of a rat driven into a corner, he determined to tear the hand that crushed him.

"I'll take action against you. I'll blazon it in the press. I'll close every decent house in the province against you," he continued, working himself up into a frenzy. "Where have you hidden my wife? By Heaven, I'll make you tell me."

"Take care!" warned Geoffrey, straightening himself and thrusting one big hand behind his back. "It is desperately hard for me to keep my fingers off you now, but if you say another word against Mrs. Leslie, look to yourself. Shackleby, you have heard him; now for the woman's sake listen to me. I have never wronged your wife by thought or word, Leslie, and the greatest indiscretion she was ever guilty of was marrying you."

"You have hidden her!" almost screamed the desperate man. "I'll have satisfaction one way if you're too strong for me another. Liar, traitor, sed——"

Geoffrey strode forward before the last word was completed, Leslie flung up one hand, but Shackleby struck it aside in time, and something that fell from it clinked with a metallic sound. Exactly how what followed really happened was never quite certain. Leslie, blind with rage, either tripped over his confederate's outstretched foot, or lost his balance, for just as a blaze of light beat upon the group, he staggered, clutched at Thurston, and missing him, stepped over the edge of the platform and fell full length between the rails.

There was a yell from a man with a lantern and a sudden hoot from the whistle of the big locomotive. Savine's face turned white under the glare of the headlight. With a reckless leap Geoffrey followed his enemy. Only conscious of the man's peril, he acted upon impulse without reflection.

"Good God! They'll both be killed!" exclaimed Shackleby.

Thurston was strong of limb and every muscle in him had been toughened by strenuous toil, but Leslie had struck his head on the rails and lay still, stunned and helpless. The lift was heavy for the man who strove to raise him, and though the brakes screamed along the line of cars the locomotive was almost upon them. Standing horrified, and, without power to move, the two spectators saw Geoffrey still gripping his enemy's shoulders, heave

himself erect in a supreme effort, then the cow-catcher on the engine's front struck them both, and Savine felt, rather than heard, a sickening sound as the huge machine swept resistlessly on. Afterward he declared that the suspense which followed while the long box-cars rolled by was horrible, for nothing could be seen, and the two men shivered with the uncertainty as to what might be happening beneath the grinding wheels.

When the last car passed both leapt down upon the track, and a man joined them holding a lantern aloft. Savine stooped over Thurston, who lay just clear of the rails, looking strangely limp.

"Another second would have done it—did I heave him clear?" he gasped. He tried to raise himself by one hand but fell back with a groan.

"I guess not," answered a railroad employé, holding the lantern higher, and while two others ran up the tracks, the light fell upon a shapeless, huddled heap. "That one has passed his checks in, certain," the holder of the lantern announced.

Within ten minutes willing assistants from the tiny settlement were on the spot and stretchers were improvised. Savine had bidden the agent telegraph for a doctor, and the two victims were slowly carried towards the New Eldorado saloon. When they were gently laid down an elderly miner, familiar with accidents, pointing to Thurston after making a hasty examination said:

"This one has got his arm broken, collar-bone gone, too, but if there's nothing busted inside he'll come round. The other one has been stone dead since the engine hit him."

There were further proffers of help from several of his comrades, who, as usual with their kind, possessed some knowledge of rude surgery. When all that was possible had been done for the living, Savine was drawn aside by Shackleby.

"This is what he dropped on the platform—I picked

it up quietly," he said, holding out an ivory-handled revolver. "No use letting any ugly tales get round or raking up that other story, is it? I don't know whether Thurston induced Leslie's wife to run off or not—from what I have heard of him I hardly think he did—but one may as well let things simmer down gracefully."

"I am grateful for your thoughtfulness," replied Savine. "Probably it is more than he would have done for you. This is hardly the time to discuss such questions, but what has happened can't affect our position. Still, personally, I may not feel inclined to push merely vindictive measures against you."

"I didn't think it would change matters," said Shackleby, with a shrug. "If I should be wanted I'm open to describe the—accident—and let other details slide. The railroad fellows suspect nothing. Thurston has made your side a strong one, and in a way I don't blame him. If he had stood in with me, we'd have smashed up your brother completely."

CHAPTER XXIX

A REVELATION

Two persons were strangely affected and stirred to unexpected action by the news of Thurston's injury, and the first of these was Julius Savine. It was late next night when his brother's messenger arrived at the ranch, for Thomas had thought of nothing but the sufferer's welfare at first, and Savine lay, a very frail, wasted figure, dozing by the stove. His sister-in-law sat busy over some netting close at hand. Both were startled when a man, who held out a soiled envelope, came in abruptly. Savine read the message and tossed the paper across to Mrs. Savine before he rose shakily to his feet.

"I would sooner have heard anything than that Geoffrey was badly hurt," he exclaimed with a quaver in his voice. To the Chinaman, who brought the stranger in, he gave the order, "Get him some supper and tell Fontaine I want him at once."

"Poor Geoffrey! We must hope it is not serious," cried Mrs. Savine with visible distress. "But sit down. You can't help him, and may bring on a seizure by exciting yourself, Julius."

Savine, who did not answer her, remained standing until the hired hand whom he had summoned, entered. "Ride your hardest to the camp and tell Foreman Tom I'm coming over to take charge until Mr. Thurston, who has met with an accident, recovers," he said. "He's to send a spare horse and a couple of men to help the sleigh over the washed-out trail. Come back at your best pace. I must reach the cañon before morning."

"Are you mad, Julius?" asked his sister-in-law when the men retired. "It's even chances the excitement or the journey will kill you."

"Then I must take the chances," declared Savine. "While there was a man I could trust to handle things, I let this weakness master me. Now the poor fellow's helpless, somebody must take hold before chaos ensues, and I haven't quite forgotten everything. You'll have to nurse Geoffrey, and it's no use trying to scare me. Fill my big flask with the old brandy and get my furs out."

Mrs. Savine saw further remonstrance would be useless. She considered her brother-in-law more fit for his grave than to complete a great undertaking, but he was clearly bent on having his way. When she hinted something of her thoughts, he answered that even so he would rather die at work in the cañon than tamely in his bed. So shivering under a load of furs he departed in the sleigh, and after several narrow escapes of an upset, reached the camp in the dusk of a nipping morning.

"Help me out. Mr. Thurston, I am sorry to say, has met with a bad accident, and you and I have got to finish this work without him," he said to the anxious foreman. "From what he told me I can count upon your doing the best that's in you, Tom."

"I won't go back on nothing Mr. Thurston said," was the quiet answer; but when Tom from Mattawa left Savine, whose nerveless fingers spilled half the contents of the silver cup he strove to fill, gasping beside the stove in Thurston's quarters, he gravely shook his head.

Several days elapsed after Helen's departure for Vancouver before Mrs. Savine, who had gone at once to the scene of the accident, considered it judicious to inform her of Geoffrey's condition, and so it happened that one evening Helen accompanied her hostess to witness the performance of a Western dramatic company. Despite second-rate acting the play was a pretty one, and each time the curtain went down Helen found the combination of bright light, pretty dresses, laughter and merry voices strangely pleasant after her isolation. At times her thoughts would wander back to the ice-bound

cañon and the man who had pitted himself against the thundering river in its gloomy depths. Perhaps the very contrast between this scene of brightness and luxury and the savage wilderness emphasized the self-abnegation he had shown. She knew now that he had toiled beyond most men's strength, when he might have rested, and casting away what would have insured him a life of ease, had voluntarily chosen an almost hopeless struggle for her sake. Few women had been wooed so, she reflected, and then she endeavored to confine her attention to the play, for as yet, though both proud and grateful, she could not admit that she had been won.

Presently the son of her hostess, who joined the party between the acts, handed her a note. "I am sorry I could not get here before, but found this waiting, and thought I'd better bring it along. I hope it's not a summons of recall," he said.

Helen opened the envelope, and the hurriedly-written lines grew blurred before her eyes as she read, "I am grieved to say that Geoffrey has been seriously injured by an accident. The doctor has, however, some hopes of his recovery, though he won't speak definitely yet. If you can find an intelligent woman in Vancouver you could trust to help me nurse him, send her along. Didn't write before because——"

"What is it? No bad news of your father, I hope," her hostess asked, and the son, a fine type of the young Western citizen, noticed the dismay in Helen's face as she answered:

"Nothing has happened to my father. His partner has been badly hurt. I must return to-morrow, and, as it is a tiresome journey, if you will excuse me, I would rather not sit out the play."

The young man noticed that Helen seemed to shiver, while her voice was strained. He discreetly turned away his head, though he had seen sufficient to show him that certain lately-renewed hopes were vain.

"Miss Savine has not been used to gayety of late, and I warned her she must take it quietly, especially with that ride through the ranges before her. This place is unsufferably hot, and you can trust me to see her safe home, mother," he said.

Helen's grateful, "Thank you!" was reward enough, but it was in an unenviable humor that the young man returned to the theater when she sought refuge in her own room.

Solitude appeared a vital necessity, for at last Helen understood. Ever since Thurston first limped, footsore and hungry, into her life she had been alternately attracted and repelled by him. His steadfast patience and generosity had almost melted her at times, but from the beginning, circumstances had seemed to conspire against the man, shadowing him with suspicion, and forcing him into opposition to her will. Mrs. Savine's story had made his unswerving loyalty plain, and Helen had begun to see that she would with all confidence trust her life to him; but she was proud, and knowing how she had misjudged him, hesitated still. As long as a word or a smile could bring him to her feet she could postpone the day of reckoning at least until his task was finished, and thus allow him to prove his devotion to the uttermost test.

Now, however, fate had intervened, tearing away all disguise, and her eyes were opened. She knew that without him the future would be empty, and the revelation stirred every fiber of her being. Growing suddenly cold with a shock of fear she remembered that she had perhaps already lost him forever. It might be that another more solemn summons had preceded her own, and that she might call and Geoffrey Thurston would not hear! He had won his right to rest by work well done, but she —it now seemed that a lifetime would be too short to mourn him. Helen shivered at the thought, then she felt as if she were suffocating. Turning the light low, she flung the long window open. Beyond the electric glare

of the city, with its shapeless pile of roofs and towering poles, the mountains rose, serenely majestic, in robes of awful purity. They were beckoning her she felt. The man whom she had learned to love too late lay among them, perhaps with the strong hands that had toiled for her folded in peace at last, and, living or dead, she must go to him. She remembered that the message said,—"Hire a capable woman in Vancouver," and it brought her a ray of comfort. If the time was not already past she would ask nothing better than to wait on him herself. Presently, when there was a hum of voices below, Helen, white of face but steady in nerves, descended to meet her hostess.

"I must go back to-morrow, and as it is a fatiguing journey you will not mind my retiring early," she said to excuse her absence from the supper party that was assembled after the play.

On reaching the railroad settlement Helen found the doctor in charge of Thurston willing to avail himself of her assistance. The physician had barely held his own in several encounters with her aunt, whom he suspected of endeavoring to administer unauthorized preparations to his patient, while on her part Mrs. Savine freely admitted that at her age she could not sit up all night forever. So Helen was installed, and it was midnight when she commenced her first watch.

"You will call me at once if the patient wakes complaining of any pain," said the surgeon. "Do I think he is out of danger? Well, he is very weak yet, my dear young lady, but if you will carry out my orders, I fancy we may hope for the best. But you must remember that a nurse's chief qualifications are presence of mind and a perfect serenity."

"I will not fail you," promised Helen, choking back a sob of relief; and, trusting that the doctor did not see her quivering face, she added softly, "Heaven is merciful!"

She had been prepared for a change, but she was startled

at the sight of Thurston. He lay with blanched patches in the paling bronze on his face, which had grown hollow and lined by pain. Still he was sleeping soundly, and did not move when she bent over him. She stooped further and touched his forehead with her lips, rose with the hot blood pulsing upwards from her neck, and stood trembling, while, either dreaming or stirred by some influence beyond man's knowledge, the sleeper smiled, murmuring, "Helen!"

It was daylight when Thurston awakened, and stared as if doubtful of his senses at his new nurse, until, approaching the frame of canvas whereon he lay, Helen, with a gentle touch, caressingly brushed the hair from his forehead.

"I have come to help you to get better. We cannot spare you, Geoffrey," she said simply.

The sick man asked no question nor betrayed further astonishment. He looked up gratefully into the eyes which met his own for a moment and grew downcast again. "Then I shall certainly cheat the doctors yet," he declared.

Under the circumstances his words were distinctly commonplace, but speech is not the sole means of communion between mind and mind, and for the present both were satisfied. Helen laughed and blushed happily when, as by an after thought, Geoffrey added, "It is really very kind of you."

"You must not talk," she admonished with a half-shy assumption of authority, strangely at variance with her former demeanor. "I shall call in my aunt with the elixir if you do."

Geoffrey smiled, but the brightness of his countenance was not accounted for by his answer: "I believe she has treated me with it once or twice already, and I still survive. In fact, I am inclined to think the doctor caught her red-handed on one occasion, and there was trouble."

After that Geoffrey recovered vigor rapidly, and the

days passed quickly for Helen as she watched over him in the dilapidated frame house to which he had been removed after the accident. No word of love passed between them, nor was any word necessary. The man, still weak and languid, appeared blissfully contented to enjoy the present, and Helen, who was glad to see him do so, abided her time.

Meanwhile, supported by sheer force of will and a nervous exaltation, that would vanish utterly when the need for it ceased, Julius Savine, leaning on his foreman's arm, or sitting propped up in a rude jumper sleigh, directed operations in the cañon. He knew he was consuming the vitality that might purchase another few years' life in as many weeks of effort, but he desired only to see the work finished, and was satisfied to pay the price. He slept little and scarcely ate, holding on to his work with desperate purpose and living on cordials. Though progress was much slower than it would have been under Geoffrey's direction, he accomplished that purpose.

One afternoon Thomas Savine entered the sick man's room in a state of complacent satisfaction.

"Glad to see you getting ahead so fast, and you must hurry, for we'll want you soon," he said. "The great charge is to be fired the day after to-morrow. Shackleby, who was at the bottom of the whole opposition, has cleared out with considerable expedition. Sold all his stock in the Company, and if his colleagues knew much about his doings, which is quite possible, they emphatically disown them. As a result I've made one or two good provisional deals with them, and expect no more trouble. In short, everything points to a great success."

When Savine went out Geoffrey beckoned Helen to him.

"I am getting so well that you must leave me to your aunt to-morrow," he said. "You remember your promise to fire the decisive charge for me, and I hope when you see it you will approve of the electric firing key. Tell your father I owe more to him than the doctor, for I should

have worried myself beyond the reach of physic if he had not been there to take charge instead of me—that is to say, before you came to cure me."

"I will go," agreed Helen, with signs of suppressed agitation that puzzled Geoffrey. She knew that after that charge had been fired their present relations, pleasant as they were, could not continue. It appeared to her the climax to which all he had dared and suffered, and with a humility that was yet akin to pride she had determined, in reparation, voluntarily to offer him that which, whether victorious or defeated otherwise, he had with infinite patience and loyal service won.

It was early one clear cold morning when Helen Savine stood on a little plank platform perched high in a hollow of the rock walls overhanging the river opposite Thurston's camp. Each detail of the scene burned itself into her memory as she gazed about her under a tense expectancy—the rift of blue sky between the filigree of dark pines high above, the rush of white-streaked water thundering down the gorge below and frothing high about the massive boulders, and one huge fang of promontory which a touch of her finger would, if all went well, reduce to chaotic débris. Groups of workmen waited on the opposite side of the flood, all staring towards her expectantly, and Thomas Savine stood close by holding an insignificant box with wires attached to it, in a hand that was not quite steady. Tom from Mattawa sat perched upon a spire of rock holding up a furled flag, and her father leaned heavily upon the rails of the staging. No one spoke or stirred, and in spite of the roar of hurrying water a deep oppressive silence seemed to brood over cañon and camp.

"This is the key," said Thomas Savine. "It is some notion of Geoffrey's, and he had it made especially in Toronto. You fit it in here."

Helen glanced at the diminutive object before she took the box. The finger grip had been fashioned out of a dollar cut clean across bearing two dates engraved upon it.

The first, it flashed upon her, was the one on which she had given the worn-out man that very coin, while the other had evidently been added more recently, with less skill, by some camp artificer.

"It's to-day," said Thomas Savine following her eyes, and Helen noticed that his voice was strained. "Geoffrey told me to get it done. Quaint idea; don't know what it means. But put us out of suspense. We're all waiting."

Helen knew what the dates meant, and appreciated the delicate compliment. It was she who had started the daring contractor on his career who was to complete his triumph, and she drew a deep breath as she looked down into the thundering gorge realizing it was a great fight he had won. Human courage and dogged endurance, inspired by him, had mocked at the might of the river, and, blasting a new pathway for it through the adamantine heart of the hills, would roll back the barren waters from a good land that the stout of heart and arm might enter in. Swamps would give place to wheat fields, orchards blossom where willow swale had been, herds of cattle fatten on the levels of the lake, and the smoke of prosperous homesteads drift across dark forests where, for centuries, the wolf and deer had roamed undisturbed. That was one aspect only, but she knew the man who loved her had won a greater triumph over his own nature and others' passions and infirmities.

It was with a thrill of pride that the girl realized all that he had done for her, and yet for a few seconds she almost shrank from the responsibility as high above the waiting men she stood with slender fingers tightening upon the key. The issues of what must follow its turning would be momentous, for it flashed upon her that the tiny combination of copper and silver might, with equal chance, open the way to a golden future or let in overwhelming disaster upon all she loved. Then the doubt appeared an injustice to Geoffrey Thurston and those who had followed him through frost and flood and whirling snow, and,

with a color on her forehead, and a light in her eyes, she pressed home the key.

Then there was bustle and hurry. Julius Savine raised his hand, and Tom from Mattawa whirled high the unfurled flag. Somebody beat upon an iron sheet invisible below, and the strip of beach in the depths of the cañon became alive with running men. Next followed a deep stillness intensified by the clamor of the river which would never raise the same wild harmonies again, for the slender hand of a woman had bound it fast henceforward under man's dominion. The hush was ended suddenly. For a second the great hollow seemed filled with tongues of flame; then, while thick smoke quenched them and crag and boulder crumbled to fragments, a stunning detonation rang from rock to rock and rolled upwards into the frozen silence of untrodden hills. Huge masses which eddied and whirled, filling the gorge with the crash of their descent leaped out of the vapor; there was a ceaseless shock and patter of smaller fragments, and then, while long reverberations rolled among the hills, the roar of the tortured river drowned the mingled din. Rising, tremendous in its last revolt, its majestic diapason was deepened by the boom of grinding rock and the detonation of boulders reduced to powder. The draught caused by the water's passage fanned the smoke away, and the blue vapor, curling higher, drifted past the staging, so that Helen could only dimly see a great muddy wave foam down the cañon, bursting here and there into gigantic upheavals of spray. She watched it, held silent, awe-stricken, by the sound and sight.

At last Mattawa Tom appeared again, and his voice was faintly audible through the dying clamors as he waved his hands: "Juss gorgeous. Gone way better than the best we hoped," he hailed.

His comrades heard and answered. They were not mere hirelings toiling for a daily wage, but men who had a stake in that region's future, and would share its pros-

perity, and, had it been otherwise, they were human still. Toiling long with stubborn patience, often in imminent peril of life and limb; winning ground as it were by inches, and sometimes barely holding what they had won; fulfilling their race's destiny to subdue and people the waste places of the earth with the faith which, when aided by modern science, is greater than the mountains' immobility, they too rejoiced fervently over the consummation of the struggle. Twice a roar that was scarcely articulate filled the cañon, and then, growing into the expression of definite thought, it flung upward their leader's name.

Helen listened, breathless, intoxicated as by wine. Julius Savine stood upright with no trace of weakness in his attitude. Then suddenly he seemed to shrink together, and, with the power gone out of him, caught at the rails as he turned to his daughter.

"We have won! It is Geoffrey's doing, and my last task is done," he spoke in a voice that sounded faint and far-away. "Fast horses and bold riders I can trust you, too, are waiting. Tell him!"

Helen noticed a strange wistfulness in her father's glance, but she asked no question and turned to Thomas Savine. "I leave him in your charge. I will go," she said.

That afternoon passed very slowly for Geoffrey. He lay near a window, which he insisted should be opened, glancing alternately at his watch and the trail that wound down the hillside as the minutes crept by. He was hardly civil to the doctor, and almost abrupt with Mrs. Savine, who, knowing his anxiety, straightway forgave him.

"You tell me I must avoid excitement and await the news with composure. For heaven's sake, man, be reasonable. You might as well recommend your next moribund victim to get up and take exercise," he grumbled to the physician.

But the longest afternoon passes at length, and when the sunset glories flamed in the western sky, and the great

peaks put on fading splendors of saffron and crimson, three black moving objects became visible on a hill-crest bare of the climbing firs. Geoffrey watched them with straining eyes, and it was a wonderful picture that he looked upon—black gorge, darkening forest, drifting haze in the hollows, and unearthly splendors above; but he regarded it only as a fit setting for the slight figure in the foreground that swayed to the stride of a galloping horse. He was not surprised—it seemed perfectly appropriate that Helen should bring him the news—though his fingers trembled and his lips twitched.

"We shall know the best or worst in five minutes. You have done your utmost, doctor, but I'll get up and annihilate you with your own bottles if you give me good advice now," he said, and the surgeon, seeing protests were useless, laughed.

Mrs. Savine said nothing. She was in a state of nervous tension, too, and merely laid her hand on the patient, restrainingly, as he strove with small success to raise himself a little. Meantime the horse came nearer, its bridle dripping with flakes of spume. Its rider was sprinkled with snow and her skirt was besmeared with lather, but she came on at a gallop until she reined in the panting horse beneath the window, and flinging one arm aloft sat in the saddle with her flushed face turned towards the watchers. No bearer of good tidings ever appeared more beautiful to an anxious man.

"It is triumph!" she cried.

"Thank God!" answered Mrs. Savine, who slipped quietly from the room.

Little time elapsed before Helen entered the room where Geoffrey impatiently waited for her, but brief as it was, there was no sign of hurried travel about her. Her apparel was fresh and dainty, and there was even a flower from Mexico at her belt. She went straight to Geoffrey and bent over him.

"All has gone well—better, I understand, than you

even hoped for, and you have done a great thing, Geoffrey," she said. "You have saved me my inheritance—which is of small importance—and—I know all now—my father's honor. You have repaid him tenfold, and gratified his heart's desire."

"Then I am thankful," answered Geoffrey very quietly. He lay still a moment looking at her with a great longing in his eyes. Helen was very beautiful, more beautiful even than usual, it seemed to him. He did not guess that she had an offering to make, and for the sake of the man at whose feet she would lay it, would not even so far as trifles went, depreciate the gift, hence her careful attire.

Helen's eyes fell beneath his gaze. She discerned what he was thinking, and, though the words "heart's desire" were accidental, there was no mistaking the suggestion. She said slowly:

"I have been unjust, proud and willful—and I am going to do full penance. You have surely the gift of prophecy. Do you remember your last bold prediction?"

Geoffrey's lip twitched. He strove to raise himself that he might see the speaker more clearly, and, still almost helpless in his bandages, slipped back again. Helen slipped her hand into his.

"I have come to beg you not to go away."

"There is one thing that would prevent me." Geoffrey, bewildered, seemed to lose his usual crispness of speech, but Helen checked him.

"Therefore," and Helen's voice was very low, while surging upwards from her neck a swift wave of color flushed cheek and brow. "I have come of my own will to say what you asked of me. You have loved and served me faithfully, and it is not gratitude—only—which prompts me now."

There was a space in which Helen caught her breath. Then she lifted her head, and said proudly:

"Geoffrey Thurston—I love you."

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